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ARIFURETA SHOKUGYOU DE SEKAISAIKYOU
世界最強
OVERLAP

Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou - Volume 01

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Prologue

In the darkness, the light was shrinking rapidly. Unconsciously, he stretched out his hands but he wasn't able to clench anything. His both legs tightened because of the dreadful feeling in falling into an endless abyss. Nagumo Hajime shows an distorted and scared emotion as he stares at the light that was gradually fading away.

Currently, Hajime is falling in the bottomless abyss. He considered it as hell. In his vision, he can only see the light from above. He explored the dungeon, While exploring he fell into a gigantic rift valley, he kept falling until he fell into a place where light couldn't reach. While in the darkness, He have seen a revolving lantern while hearing the sound of the wind.

As a Japanese citizen himself, if he was to express his opinion when he come to this world. The inequality he experienced in his old world. The inequality he experienced here and now is too much to take in. Savoring the misfortune in this sequence of events is now progressing.

Monday. That is the beginning of the melancholy of the week. Majority of people will sigh in this beginning of the week while recalling the paradise that happen in the previous days.

And Nagumo Hajime is not against to this kind of tradition. However, in Hajime's case, it's not just troublesome. The whole school is extremely evil for him. Probably because of depression.

As always, last minute before the bell chime rings, standing before the door of the classroom, Hajime was staggering because pulling an all-night.

At that moment, majority of the boys in the classroom was clicking their tongues and glares that directed to him. The girls also didn't have a friendly expression either. No one seems interested in saying good things and there are some people who have scorn expression directed to him.

Hajime did his best to ignore it and go towards his seat but there are still people that meddles with him.

"Yoo, 'Kimoota' ! Playing again games all night, was it an 'eroge'? I wonder?"

"Uwaa, 'Kimoi'. Playing an 'eroge' all night. You really are creepy."

What the heck is funny? Boys in the classroom laugh out. The boy who's arguing with him is Hayama Daisuke, the head of the people who're daily routine is picking up on Hajime. His three companions beside him that have an idiotic laugh are Saitou Yoshiki, Kondou Reiichi and Nakano Shinji. Generally four people who're frequently teasing Hajime.

As Hayama stated, Hajime is an 'Otaku' but to be called as 'Kimoota' is too far from maximum. My personal appearance, speech and conduct is not really creepy. My hair was cut in somewhat short and didn't even have a bed hair. I'm not really harmful to the community but I didn't have a nice personality either. I'm replying to people who talks to me in clarity. Quiet but not really gloomy. Simple creations□□I like things such as manga, novels, games and movies.

'Otaku's criticism is certainly strong in public society. Originally, even though it has an scorn degree, it will not have a hospitality here. Then, why's the boys the hospitality and contempt.

A girl suddenly intercept.

"Nagumo-kun, Good morning! You're late again, why don't you come earlier than usual."

A classmate wearing a smile step up closer to Hajime. In that class, no in that school. She's one of the few exceptions who treat Hajime

as a friend. She's also the cause of the situation.

A girl named Shirasaki Kaori. The school's one of the two goddess that are both popular in men and women. Having a tremendous popularity and to be boast as a 'bishoujo'. A glossy black long hair that reach his waist. Having a little hanging-like gentle large eyes. Her tiny nose is aligned perfectly and she have a 'Sakura' color lips.

Always wearing an endless smile, she's very caring and have a strong sense of responsibility. She's always being relied on in spite of her year. She always react when someone make a disagreeable face, she's more mature than most of the high school student.

Why would someone like Kaori always cared about Hajime. Because of pulling an all-night, Hajime always dozed off in the class. He can't be consider as a diligent student(The results are getting on average) Kaori, who's naturally taking care of people always minded about him.

With this, Hajime's class work behavior is in improvement or he can be known as an 'ikemen' that Kaori always think about but unfortunately, Hajime's appearance is extremely ordinary "Hobbies before Life" is his favorite motto and that is the behavior that can be seen in Hajime. With that kind of Hajime, can he get closer to Kaori? Similarly common to by students that didn't have patience. Why he is the only one? Kaori who's always taking care of troublesome people furthermore if you don't do things for his own improvement that ends up in an unpleasant feeling.

"Ah! Aaah, Good Morning, Shirasaki-san."

To assume that this is bloodlust coming from his classmates. Such discernment was exposed, Hajime returned the greeting stiffly.

Kaori who were a joyful expression. Why is she making that kind of expression!? Moreover Hajime break out from the cold sweat because of the piercing gazes. Hajime always wondering about this kind of mystery. Why is the number one 'bishoujo', Kaori herself insist to take care of me? Hajime considered that there are some kind of reason that he didn't know besides of her nature taking care of people.

However, it can't be that Kaori herself is carrying feelings of love and she has no intentions to conceit it. Hajime himself is focusing in his hobbies. Her face, grades and movement ability is ordinary. He's too far being a candidate in Kaori's ideal man. Therefore, the girl's behavior is still a mystery.

Just a moment, please notice this tempest of bloodlust! Your real intention is in petition but he couldn't say it. After this, surely, someone will take me in compulsion behind the gymnasium.

When Hajime was about to finish the conversation. Three people get closer to us. One of them can be considered as "Nice Guy".

"Nagumo-kun. Good Morning. Isn't it terrible everyday?"

"Kaori, Are you looking after him again? Kaori is really nice."

"It really is, whatever you say to this non-motivated guy, it's useless."

Among the three of them. The only one who greeted me a "Good Morning" is Yaegashi Shizuku. Kaori's bestfriend. Her trademark is long black ponytail, sharp slit eyes but you can sense that her interior part is soft. She even get cool impression by her schoolmates rather than being cold.

One hundred seventy-two centimeters tall stature and has a tightened body, Her atmosphere is most likely a 'samurai'. In reality, the girl's parents is teaching the Yaegashi style who're running a 'Kenjutsu Dojo'. Shizuku herself, since elementary school, she join multiple tournaments and haven't lost yet. Nowadays, the 'bishoujo' swordsman always appear in the future magazines as the cover. There are dying hard fans as well, Junior female students sometimes call her'Onee-sama'.

The next one is the one who spoke that has somewhat fishy words was Amanogawa Kouki. He has a Hero-like sparkling name, nice appearance, have an excellent grades and perfect superman of all sports.

A nice guy with a smooth brown hair. He's about one hundred

centimeters tall, slender guy with a toned body. He's nice to anyone and have a strong sense of justice (Extreme Belief) . When he was a child, he attends Yaegashi dojo. He's the same as Shizuku in national class and man of Valor. He and Shizuku are childhood friends. Dozen of females students in school falls in love in him but he's always with Shizuku and Kaori so many of the girls seems to get nervous. But still not less than twice of the month confessed their love that's why he's a hardcore in being a popular guy.

The last one is the one that carelessly conveying his true feelings was Sakagami Ryoutarou, Kouki's bestfriend. Short trimmed hair. He's sharp and cheerful into people's eyes. One hundred centimeters stature. Large bear-like physique. He doesn't seem to pay much attention to details even his brain seemed like it was made out of muscles.

Ryoutarou is determined, hotblooded, willpower person unlike Hajime whom always go to school just to lie down. He doesn't seem have a willful person that's why Ryoutarou didn't like him. Actually, Hajime just ignore him and laugh whenever he received glances from him, Hajime doesn't seem to be interested in Ryoutaru as well.

"Good Morning. Yaegashi-san, Amanogawa-kun, Sakagami-kun. Haha, well, it can't be helped. I'm paying my own mistakes."

She returned a greeting to them while Hajime makes a bitter smile. "You bastard, what the hell did you say to Yaegashi-san, Haa?!" What I want to say but my mouth stop her glance. Most of our classmates is gazing at us because of Yaegashi and Kaori's famousness.

"If he knows how to fix it, why don't he fix it himself? I can say that he's fawning on Kaori's kindness. Kaori is just too nice that's why she has no choice."

Kouki warns Hajime. As I though, in Kouki's eyes, Hajime seems to be reflected as an insincere student who does Kaori's kindness bluntly. In Hajime's mind "There's no way I'm going to fawn on his kindness or rather just leave me alone!" Wanting to say the objection loudly but with that kind of situation I might get carried

out in compulsion by a group of people. Kouki himself gets the wrong impression but he always thought that he's correct. Hajime thought that's it's useless to argue so he just close his mouth.

Even if you say to 'fix it'. There's no way that Hajime will put his hobby aside and become a sincere student. Why? His father is a game creator and his mother is a 'Shoujo Mangaka'. He wants to be prepared for the future, in either working part-time in his father's office or on his mother's work site.

In his abilities, his works will be already a war potential treatment, this kind of hobby focus in his future plans is bad in the current situation. If Hajime became sincere in life, who and what will the people say in his current lifestyle. For himself, changing his lifestyle isn't needed.

"No～～, Ahaha……"

And then Hajime just laugh and let it go but our goddess of unawareness dropped a bomb.

"? Kouki-kun, what are you saying? I'm, me and Nagumo-kun are just talking about something."

The classroom became noisy. Male students glared at him. The noise is like to pray for doing something like killing Hajime. It seems like after lunch break, Hiyama and his comrades will be taking Hajime somewhere for some kind of investigation.

"Eeh? …….Aah, really? Kaori is reall kind."

It seems like Kouki wants to Kaori to have an explanation in what they are talking about. Just a minute ago, He's the cause and he's at the faulty in doubting Hajime and no one seems to react. Well, he's the flawless superman after all. Then Hajime escape the reality by viewing the blue sky in the window.

"……I'm sorry, Those two doesn't have an evil intent."

There's a person that is aware in someone's fault, like his childhood friend. Shizuku always apologize secretly when something like this happen. As Hajime thought "It can't be helped" he cramped his

shoulders and show a bitter smile.

And then the opening chime rings and the teacher enter the classroom. The classroom's atmosphere became more strange, she took the morning attendance. And the, usually Hajime dreams about something in travelling in his favored world, naturally when the teacher is starting the lesson.

Kaori showed a smile at that kind of Hajime, Yaegashi showed an amazed expression. The male students were clicking their tongues and the female students were making scornful gazes.

A short while later, the class is starting to be noisy. The dozing recidivist wake up. Hajime remembers his body to rise at that sensation, lunch break enters. Hajime take and put down his lunch for the basic which can be eaten in ten seconds out with jarring sound. Somehow the classroom got empty because most of the students goes out to buy by group. It's too late to rush outside so a student about 2/3 stayed in the classroom. He eats his lunch box set as fast as he can. The four hour session was already ender a while ago and Aiko Hatakeyama who's in charge in Social Studies (Twenty-five years old this year) was chatting with several students at her desk.

□□'Jurururu, Kyupon'!

Hajime whom charged his energy in the morning will probably asleep after ten seconds. He tries to put his face in his desk. But before he fell asleep our goddess, whom Hajime defines her as a demon, approached Hajime's seat.

In Hajime's inner thoughts "This is bad" and groaned. In this Monday, Hajime seems to be half-asleep. As always before Kaori and the others got worried about him, it's usual for him to go out of the classroom and nap in a place which isn't conspicuous. An all-nighter on the Saturday and Sunday seems to have been effective quietly indeed.

"Nagumo-kun. It's unusual, you are here. If you want to how about we eat together?"

The classroom's air was filled with bloodlust. Hajime screams inside his heart. "Can't you just leave me alone? Talking to you will give me trouble." Hajime still can't find her real intentions.

Hajime tries to resist.

"Ah, Thanks for inviting me, Shirasaki-san but I'm already done eating so why not go eat with Amanogawa-kun and the others?"

With that said, he shows his lunch package that was half of it was sucked up. If Hajime refuse some thought of his classmates will be probably "Who the hell are you to refuse Kaori's invitations!?" The lunch break would probably become very uncomfortable for him.

But that kind of refusal doesn't make sense on our goddess. She pressed herself on just to eat lunch with Hajime.

"Ehh! That's all did you eat? That's no good, be sure to eat a lot. How about I share my lunch box to you?"

(Ahh, That's enough already! Please notice! Please notice the atmosphere here!)

In every moment the pressure was increasing, Hajime can feel that he broke into cold sweat. Suddenly, the saviors appeared, it's Kouki and Ryoutarou.

"Kaori. We can eat at this place together. Nagumo doesn't have enough sleep yet. It's Kaori's home cooked lunch, right? I can't forgive anyone eating your lunch in a half-sleep mode."

Kaori who looks at Kouki blankly who throws up an affecting words while laughing refreshly. Our goddess is unaware in what Kouki is saying.

"Ehh? Why do I need to get Kouki's permission?"

"Bufu" With Kaori's words, Shizuku can't stop laughing. Roughly speaking, Kouki makes a troubled laugh. In the end, Hajime seat along with the school's famous group. His classmates glances didn't change and didn't decrease.

Hajime breathe out a deep sigh and starts complaining in his innermost thoughts.

(I already have enough, why don't this guys summon in another world? No matter how you put it, it's clear that this guys should be drag in that kind of event. Another world's God, Princess, or Shrine Maiden whoever it is, Why don't you summon this guys to another world?)

In order to escape this cruel reality, Hajime just fly over in another world. As always Hajime made a bitter smile to escape from what they're talking. When he's about to stand and get away from them……He froze from where he's standing.

□□In front of Hajime, there's a silver magic circle appear in Kouki's underfoot.

In that kind of abnormal situation, the students noticed it. The students got paralyzed because of the shining pattern, they looked at that thing and everyone thought that it was a magic circle.

The magic circle's radiance have become brighter and it glows gradually as it cover the entire classroom. The magic circle draw

nears to my own underfoot and after that the stiffening was gone, the students scream as they experienced this kind of abnormality. The classroom's teacher, Aiko-sensei shouts "Everyone, leave the classroom as fast as you can."But it's too late. The magic circle is about to explode.

After a several seconds, a few minutes the pure white light again paint out the whole classroom. None of his classmates escape the phenomenon. The chairs that was kicked down, the lunch boxes that was eaten, the dispersed chopsticks and petbottles. The furniture of the classroom is there but the people who used it have vanished.

That event, The Mysterious Disappearance of High School Students During Daytime. That cause trouble and fear all over the world but that was now a different story.

Chapter 1

Hajime stood with his hands protecting his face and his eyesclose, only to open them when he heard a rustling noise.

He looked around in amazement. What caught his eyes first was alarge mural. It was 10 meters in height; there was a personwith androgynous features with an aureole on his back, longflowing blonde hair, and a slight smile. A grassy plain, lake, andmountains were in the background. The person had his handsextended. It was beautiful; but, Hajime felt his eyes cold.

When he looked around, he noticed they were in a huge hall. Hethought it made entirely of marble. The entire building had asmooth, white luster. It had huge pillars holding the dome ceiling up. The place looked like a cathedral, and the hall had asolemn atmosphere.

Hajime and his class were at the top of a pedestal located in thedeepest part of the building. They were higher than thesurroundings. His classmates looked about, stunned by what they saw. Everyone in the classroom was caught up in thesituation.

Hajime looked behind him. There he saw Kaori stunned by whatwas before them. She did not seem injured; Hajime feltrelieved.

Perhaps the people around the pedestal would explain. Indeed,Hajime and his classmates were not the only ones present.

There were at least thirty people on their knees in prayer, theirhands before their chest. All wore a white robe embroideredwith gold, and they all had a staff next to them. The tip of eachstaff spread out like a fan with several disks hanging in a circle.

One particular priest, about 70 years old based on hisappearance, stood out with his formal head wear which wasclose to 30 centimeters in height; he stepped forward. Despitehis old age, he

wore a flashy robe and may have passed forsomeone in his 50s if not for the wrinkles marking his face.The old priest spoke to them with a clear and calm voice befittinghis appearance, staff in hand.

“Welcome to Tortus, Hero and his fellow countrymen. Wewelcome you. I am Ishtar Rombard, and I am the Pope of theSaint Church. Please, let us get along well.”

After introducing himself, he showed them a smile oftenassociated with the friendly elderly. Without this, the students,confused, likely would never have been able to settle down.Eventually they were guided out.

Hajime and the rest moved locations, passing through the greathall to a room with tables lined up. Without exception, thisroom was made in gorgeous detail. From a layman’sperspective, all decorations were done masterfully. This waslikely where they would eat. Kouki’s group of four and Aiko-senseisat at the head of the table while Hajime sat at the lastspot.

No one made noise as they were guided here and seated; theirminds were trying to work out what happened to them. It wasup to Ishtar to explain the situation. Even Kouki with his MAX Level Charisma silently pondered to himself. Aiko-sensei, everthe teacher, gathered the students with tears in her eyes.

When everyone was seated, maids entered with push carts. Right,real maids! Not fat old women like those on Earth! Beautifulmaids, embodying the dreams of men!

The majority of the boys stared at the maids in their adolescence,despite the cold gazes from the girls…Hajime also looked at the maid who came to his side to servedrinks… but he felt a chill down his spine. When he lookedabout, he noticed Kaori smiling. Hajime decided to stop looking.

Ishtar began his explanation after confirming everyone hadreceived a drink.

“I’m certain you’re all confused. Allow me to explain, so listen tothe end before asking any questions.”

After that, Ishtar arbitrarily explained the situation which was likesfantasy.

In short,First, the world was called Tortus. In this world, there were threemajor races. Humans, Devils, and Demi-humans. Humans ruledthe north while Devils ruled the south. Demi-humans livedquietly in the wilderness to the east.

Of these, Humans and Devils were at war for centuries. Relatively,an individual devil was far stronger than an individual human,but Humans had the advantage of numbers. Both sides had not waged a large-scale war, but they were both preparingthemselves. Recently, many abnormal things had occurred.

Demons had been deployed by the Devils.

Demons were a variant of wild animals who took in magic andchanged. They were not considered true living organisms. Theyhad the power to utilize peculiar magic other races could not, which made them dangerous.Until now, there were very few people who could tame them.

Even if tamed, the tamer could control one or two at the most.This common sense was reversed by the Devils. Now, Humanslost the advantage of numbers and were facing a crisis.

“The one who summoned you here is Eht-sama. He is the Godwho protects us and the existence we of the Saint Churchrevere. He created our world. Most likely, he realized we werefacing destruction and summoned you here to avoid that veryfuture. The world you come from is higher ranked than ours,so the people of your world will have exceptional power here.

Before the summons, we prayed to Eht-sama for salvation.With your powers, we will overthrow the Devils and saveHumans; that is the will of Eht-sama. “

There, Ishtar stopped and said “This is all decreed by a divinationfrom the oracle”and continued speaking without changinghis expression.

“I will show all of you the means by which you will overthrow theDevils. That is the will of “Eht-sama,” to help we Humans.”

Ishtar spoke with a rapt expression. He was most likely recallingwhat an oracle had told him. It seemed more than 90% ofHumans followed the teachings of the Saint Church, and thosewho have heard the oracle were in positions of power.

Hajime suspected the so called “Will of God.” He felt Ishtar wasdistorting what the world truly was and what it faced.

Suddenly, Aiko-sensei protested.

“Please do not make fools of us! You are asking these children tofight a war! How could I allow such a thing! I will not! Please,let us return! Their families must be worrying about them! You have simply kidnapped us!”

Aiko-sensei was angry. She was a popular history teacher who was25 years old. She had a childish face and a height of 150centimeters. Her hair was done in a bob cut, and, for herstudents’ sake, she did her best. Despite her childish frame,she protected the students.

The students often called her “Ai-chan,” even if she did get upsetby it. She aimed to be a dignified teacher.

She was angered at the unreasonable summoning and stoodagainst it. Ah, she was trying her best again. There werestudents who looked at her admonishing Ishtar with a fuzzyfeeling in their hearts. However, the following words fromIshtar froze them.

“I sympathize with your feelings. Unfortunately… we have nomeans of returning you.”

Silence filled the halls. A cold air spread throughout the room.

Everyone gazed at Ishtar, speechless.

“What do you mean by that? If you can summon us, you shouldbe able to send us back!”

Aiko-sensei shouted.

“As I said before, it wasEht-sama who summoned you. Themagic which interferes with other worlds is a magic we cannotuse. Whether or not you can return is for Eht-sama to decide.”

“How could this be…”

Aiko-sensei lost her strength and dropped to her chair like astone. The students started speaking up.

“No way!Why can’t we return!?”

“No, I want to go home!”

“War? Stop screwing with us!”

“Why, why, why…”

The students began panicking. Even Hajime was having difficultykeeping himself composed. However, being immersed in otakuculture, he had read many situations like this before, so he expected a similar pattern. Since it was not the worst, he wasmuch calmer than the other students. Incidentally, one of theworst involve being summoned as a slave.

While everyone was off guard, Ishtar calmly watched theirreactions. Hajime, however, could see contempt behind hiscalm expression. The priest was probably thinking it was anhonor to be picked by Eht-sama.

Still, the panic did not settle down. Kouki eventually stood up andslammed the table. It surprised the students and got theirattention. When he confirmed everyone was watching him, hebegan talking.

“Everyone, there’s no need to make so much noise in front ofIshtar-san. He had nothing to do with it… Me, I’m going tofight. The people here are facing a crisis. I can’t possibly ignoretheir pleas for help. If we were brought here to save others,then maybe we can return after saving them. Is that right,Ishtar-san?”

“Yes, surely Eht-sama will answer the wishes of our saviors.”

“We have special powers, right? I’ve been feeling really odd sinceI’ve come here.”

“Correct. Roughly, each of you have power several times higherthan the people of this world.”

“Then that’s fine. I’ll fight. I’ll save the people and go home. I’llsave the world, you’ll see!”

Kouki gripped his fist tightly with his declaration. Vainly, Koukishowed a sparkling smiled. His MAX Level Charisma wasclearly effective here. The students who were in despair beforeregained their calm. Kouki’s eyes shined brightly, having foundhope in the situation. Half the school girls looked at him inadmiration.

“I thought you’d say something like that. I’d be worried if youwent alone, so I’ll fight, too.”

“Ryuutarou.”

“This is all we can do for now. It’s not like I hate it. I’ll fight, too.”

“Shizuku…”

“Ehh, if Shizuku-chan is going, then I’ll try my best.”

“Kaori…”

The usual group of four spoke up. The rest of the class seemed togo with the flow as well. While Aiko-sensei tried to argueagainst it with tear-filled eyes, it was pointless against Kouki’s display.

In the end, everyone was going to participate in the war. Mostlikely, they did not truly understand what that meant and werejust fantasizing. They agreed as a form of escapism, lest their spirits crumble beneath the surreal situation.

Hajime just observed Ishtar while thinking this. The priest lookedsatisfied.

Hajime noticed it, though. While Ishtar was giving his explanation,he had observed Kouki and the students, confirming whatreaction they would have to his story. With Kouki's strongsense of justice, it was easy to see how he would react to thetragedy befalling Humans. He embellished stories of the Devils'cruelty. The man had good insight and was looking for whowould be able to most influence the group.

It was natural for someone in the world's largest religion, but hewas a crafty person. Hajime noted Ishtar as being someone heshould be careful of.

Since they all agreed to participate in the war, it was necessary tolearn how to fight. Even if they had the power and potential,they were still regular high school students accustomed topeace.

Suddenly fighting demons and devils would not go sowell.

However, their circumstances were predicted to some extent.According to Ishtar, the Saint Church was located on"Kamiyama"and "Hairihi Kingdom"located at the base,would arrange for this. The Kingdom had very close ties withthe Saint Church. The God they worshiped was Eht, the God ofCreation, and the country was founded by Sharm Ban, an avidbelieve in the Saint Church. As such, the relationship betweenthe Church and the Kingdom was strong.The students left theSaint Church via the front gate anddescended the mountain to Hairihi Kingdom. When the

majestic gates opened, there was a sea of clouds below togreet them. Even if they were at a high altitude, they did notfeel the effects. Perhaps magic had made the livingenvironment more comfortable. They were fascinated to seethe blue sky, sparkling sun, and sea of clouds.

Ishtar urged them to proceed while boasting about various things.

Eventually, a circular white pedestal surrounded by fencescame into view. The beautiful corridor was made of the samematerial as the cathedral they were summoned to. Theyapproached the pedestal and rode on it.

There were large magic formations carved into the pedestal. Thestudents gathered at the center restlessly, away from the skybelow.

Ishtar began to chant.

“Guiding path, Open for the faithful, “Celestial Path.””

As soon as he said this, the magic formation began to shine. Thepedestal began moving smoothly, as if it were a rope way,heading diagonally toward the ground. Apparently the“Incantation” empowered the magic formation engraved inthe pedestal. For students seeing magic for the first time, thiswas an exciting sight. When the pedestal broke through theclouds, it caused an uproar.

Eventually they passed through the clouds and the ground couldbe seen. They could see a city beneath them. A huge castlewas built into the mountain side, and the city spread radiallyoutward.

This was Hairihi Kingdom. The pedestal led them tothe roof of an expensive looking towerconnected to thePalace.

Hajime cynically laughed to himself at the production value. Todescend from the heavens through the sea of clouds, it was asif they were being presented as God’s Chosen. This presented both the students and the Saint Church in a good light.Hajime recalled pre-war Japan. At that time, religion and politicswere closely tied together, and it was likely they would meettrouble later on; however, this world seemed even more tense.

After all, this world had the power to touch other worlds, allwhile following “The Will of God.”The possibility of them returning all relied on saving the worldand the feelings the so called God had. While looking over thecity, Hajime suppressed the unease in his heart. Regardless, hecould only do what he could.

When they arrived at the Royal Palace, they were ushered intothe throne room immediately. They walked through thecorridors and could not help but notice the beauty of thedecorations. Along the way, they saw people dressed up likeknights as well as maids. Many

looked at the students in awe;it seemed they were already well known.

Hajime was uncomfortable, so he stuck to the end of the group.They arrived in front of a set of double doors which werebeautifully designed, two soldiers standing at attention oneither side. Without waiting for a reply, they opened the door.

Ishtar leisurely entered as if it were natural. The students werefilled with unease with the exception of Kouki.

When Hajime entered the doors, he saw a red carpet leadingfrom the entrance to a luxurious throne.

On the throne sat a middle-aged man whose presence conveyedambition and dignity. They stood before the throne andwaited. There was a woman next to the throne, likely theQueen. Next to her was a 10 year old boy with blonde hair andblue eyes. A pretty 14 or 15 year old girl stood next to him.

Many people who looked like civil officers stood on the rightside of the carpet while military officers stood on the left side.They stopped before the throne while Ishtar stood next to theKing.

The King lightly kissed the Pope's hand as a sign ofrespect. It seemed the Pope had the highest authority here,which only confirmed Hajime's theory that the country wasrun by "God," causing him to sigh inwardly.

They began introducing themselves. The King was Elhid S. B.Hairihi. The Queen was Luluaria,Randell the Prince, and Lilianathe 1st Princess. Afterward, the Prime Minister, KnightCommander, and others of high status introduced themselves.

Kaori's charm must have been universal, since the youngPrince was gazing at her admiringly.

A banquet was held, allowing them to enjoy the world's cuisine.The Kingdom itself was similar to middle-age Europe on Earth.They were served a pink drink which glistened like a rainbow;it was

quite delicious.

Since the Prince took a liking to Kaori, he was often seen talkingto her, causing many of the boys in the class to fret. Hajime didnot expect much, however, because the Prince was just 10years old.

In the Royal Palace, they were introduced to the instructors who would train them. They would also be provided shelter, food,and clothing. The instructors were handpicked from among the knights, Court Magicians, and many more. This allowed them to befriend others for the forthcoming war.

After finishing dinner, everyone was led to their room. Hajime was not the only one amazed by the bed with a canopy over it. He felt uncomfortable in such a luxurious room; still, it allowed him to release all the stress and strain he experienced for theday. He laid on the bed and drifted off to sleep.

Training and lectures began the next day.Every student was presented a silver plate 12 centimeters by 7 centimeters. The students looked at the plates curiously when Commander Meld Loggins began to explain their purpose.

He thought it good to have a consistent attendance for training,and he did not want to leave everything to the students to clean up the mess their people were in. Other than Commander Meld, there was the Vice-commander who simply laughed and said everything would be fine. The man was probably good.

“All right, everyone get one? These are called Status Plates. They will show you your stats and serve as an identification card. As long as you have this, you won’t get lost, so don’t lose it.”

Commander Meld had a carefree way of speaking. He was broadminded, and he did not talk to them formally because they would be comrades in the future. He advised them to do the same. This brought a sense of ease, but many of the students did not feel comfortable speaking to their elders in such a nonchalant manner.

“Take a needle and make a small nick in your finger. Drop someof your blood on the magic formation engraved on the plate toregister

ownership. If you say “Status Open,” the plate will show you your stats. Ah, have you never seen anythingsimilar? Sorry, I didn’t know that. These objects are a kind ofartifact which have been used since ages past.”

“Artifact?”

Kouki asked, being unfamiliar with the term.

“An artifact is a powerful tool which cannot be reproduced bymodern means. It is said they were created when God and hisfamily roamed this land. The Status Plate is one such artifact. Itwould usually be considered a national treasure, but this isdistributed to the general public, since it’s a convenient foridentification.”

As an aside, the Status Plates were strictly managed by the SaintChurch.

“I see”,the students nodded as they pricked the fingertips with needles. When blood came to the surface, they rubbed the blood across the magic formation. The magic formations shined. Hajime, too, did the same.

Hajime’s Status Plate shined for a moment, then it changed to asky blue color for an instant before soaking into the material.

Hajime stared at it. The other students, too, were staring attheirs.

Commander Meld gave an explanation to the students. Theirmagic was a different color, dependent on the person, andwhen registering information on the plate, it was another means of identification.(My magic is light blue, or I guess cerulean? It’s a beautiful color…)

Hajime glanced around, his mood becoming less dark upon seeingthe light. The other students, too, were looking at their owncolor.

Kouki’s was snow white, Ryuutarou’s was forest green, Kaori’s wasa light violet, and Shizuku’s was a lapiz lazuli color.

= = = =

Nagumo Hajime 17 Years Male Level: 1

Class: Transmuter

STR: 10

VIT: 10

RES: 10

AGI: 10

MAG: 10

MDEF: 10

Skill: **Transmute Language Comprehension**

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steadypractice and experience.”

“Next us is “Class.” Simply put, this is your talent. The skills youhave at the end of your stats are directly linked to your class.People who have classes are rare. They can be divided into two categories, combat and non-combat. A combat class appearsin one out of one-thousand people, while non-combatantsshow up in one out of one-hundred. Amongst those with noncombatclasses, one out of ten are rare. Most people in noncombatnlasses have manufacturing nlasses.”

Hajime looked at his Status Plate. He was a “Transmuter,” and hewas gifted with the ability of “Transmute.” Well, they werefrom a stronger world, so it was natural he would have higherspecs than the average person from Tortus. Hajime smirkedslightly to himself at that thought. He wasglad to have atalent.

However, his joy was short lived as Commander Meld beganexplaining things further.

“Now then… Let’s see what everyone has. The average person atLevel 1 has stats around 10. You should be several timeshigher. I’m jealous! Please, report what your Status Plate says.This willhelp us develop a training regimen which suits you.”

Hajime’s stats lined up perfectly to display all 10s. Hajime tiltedhis head and scratched it as he broke out in an unpleasantsweat.

(Eh～? No matter how you look at it, I’m completely average… veryaverage. I’m not a cheat at all. What about everyone else? Maybe it’s like this at the start.)

Hajime clung to this hope as he looked at the others. Everyonehad a bright face; however.Immediately responding to Commander Meld’s request, Koukistepped forward and spoke.

= = = =

Class: Hero

STR: 100

VIT: 100

RES: 100

AGI: 100

MAG: 100

MDEF: 100

Skill: **All Attributes Affinity □All Attributes Resist □**

Physical Tolerance □Swordsmanship □Strength Boost □

Ground Contraction □Foresight □High Speed Magic

Recovery □Physical Perception □Magic Perception □Limit

Break □Language Comprehension

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and was acquired when a person “Broke through a wall.”

It sounded simple, but it was obviously not something thatcould be obtained in a day. Still, getting one essentially gave alarge boost to skill proficiency in a single day.

It was not just Kouki who was special. The others, while not ashigh as Kouki’s, also had superior stats at a cheat level. Manyof his classmates had combat classes as well. Hajime lookeddown at his own. When trying to imagine it, he could not thinkit a combat class. He also only had two skills, and one of themwas the default Language Comprehension Skill. Truthfully, heonly had one real skill. Hajime smiled dryly. Hajime handed hisplate to Commander Meld when his turn arrived.

Until now, Meld always seemed eager to see the Status Plates. Hewas happy to have so many powerful comrades. He continuedto smile when he saw Hajime’s plate. He hit it, hoping it wasmalfunctioning. After staring at it, he returned the plate toHajime with an unremarkable expression.

“Ah, when you think about Transmuters, they’re a crafting class.It’s useful if you want to be a blacksmith…”

Commander Meld did his best to describe the class to Hajimewith as much articulation as possible.

The boys who disliked Hajime would clearly jump at thisopportunity to make fun of him. He was clearly a non-combatclass while all his classmates had combat classes. Hajimewould not behelpful in the future in the least.While grinning, Hiyama Daisuke screamed aloud.

“Hey, hey, Nagumo, it can’t be, you got a non-combat class? Howcan a crafting class fight? Meld-san, is this class rare?”

“… Well, one out of ten crafting classes. Every country employs anumber of them.”

“Nagumo～ Are you going to fight like that?”

Hiyama threw his arm around Hajime’s shoulder just to annoyhim.

The boys in the surroundings were smirking at hismisfortune.

“Who knows~ I won’t know if I don’t try it out.”

“Let’s see your stats. The class isn’t that great, but you’ve gotgood specs, right?”

He could already guess the stats based on Meld’s expression, buthe wanted to bully Hajime even more. Truly a bastard. Histhree lackeys also joined in on the fun. It was their typicalbehavior,joining in once their leaders picked on someone. Thefact was, though, both Kaori and Shizukuwere displeased withhis bullying.

Daisuke liked Kaori, however, he was unable to read her disdainfor his actions for some reason. Hajime simply handed hisplate over like it was nothing.

When Hiyama saw Hajime’s plate, he laughed and passed it to theothers.

“Buhahaha~ What is this! It’s all average!”

“Gyahahaha~ They’re all 10s, you’re probably weaker than thekids around the block~”

“Hya ha haha~ I can’t get enough of this! He’s going to die! Hecan’t even be a meat shield!”

Kaori started to approach them with an angry expression, butAiko-sensei called out in anger first.

“Hey! What are you laughing at! I won’t let you laugh at yourclassmate! Definitely not! Return Nagumo-kun’s plate!”

Aiko-sensei tried to express her anger with her tiny body. Theyreluctantly returned his plate to him.

Aiko-sensei tried to cheer Hajime up with a tap of his shoulders.

“Nagumo-kun, don’t mind it. I’m also a non-combat class. Mystats are average, too. You’re not alone.”

Aiko-sensei handed her plate to him.

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“N-Nagumo-kun! Are you okay!?”

Hajime no longer responded. Shizuku just smiled wryly. Kaori ranup to them anxiously while Aiko-sensei looked confused. Asusual, she was somewhat of an air-head.Though it did stop thebullying Hajime had gone through, it onlydrove the point home that his future would be one filled withdifficulty.

2 weeks passed since Hajime’s condition was known to everyone.Currently, Hajime was using his break in training to peruse thelibrary. There was a large book titled “An Illustrated Guide tothe Demons of the Northern Continent” that Hajime had readthe majority of. The reason was because, despite 2 weeks oftraining, his lack of talent showed up even more strongly. Sincehe was notstrong, he was studying to gain knowledge hecould use.

Hajime looked through the book for a long time but eventuallysighed and threw it back onto the desk. The librarian glared athim when the book made a loud noise.

After flinching for a moment, Hajime apologized. After staring athim, the librarian let it go. He sighed toward himself.

Hajime slowly took out his Status Plate and rested it on his palm.

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Skill: **Transmute □Language Comprehension**

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Magic in Tortus was processed via an aria and magic formation.Magic runs from the body through the magic formation toachieve its results. There was no way to directly manipulatemagic in its base form, so a proper preparation was necessary.Also, the amount of magic power used was related to how long anincantation lasted. The size and complexity of the formationalso dictated the scale of effect, all of which were necessaryfor stronger spells.

To cast a simple “Fireball” which was a classic in RPGs, it requireda magic formation 20centimeters in diameter to cast. Thebasic concepts of magic included power, range, scope, and magic consumption. Conductivity and other similar elementscould be added to increase duration and effect as well.

There were exceptions to these concepts, however.Those were “Aptitudes.” With this, some parts of the formation could be omitted. As an example, those with an aptitude for fire could skip writing a portion of the magic formula, replaced with imagery in the caster’s mind.

Since most human beings had an aptitude of some sort, the 20centimeter diameter magic circle was the average. Hajime,however, had no aptitude, so he needed to add more to thisbasic formation to get the same effect. He needed to add infactors such as speed, trajectory, diffusion rate, and muchmore. He required a 2 meter magic circle to perform the mostbasic “Fireball” spell, so it was completely useless in combat.For magic, there were two ways to engrave formulas. One wasinto special metals or minerals which were reusable, while theother was to inscribe them on special paper which wasdisposable. The former was more expensive and morepowerful than the latter; however, since the non-paper formswere always bulky, it was difficult to carry many of them. Bothhad their own advantages and disadvantages. The staff Ishtarheld was a more permanent type.

Because of how magic worked, it was impractical in close combat,and it would be impossible without an aptitude for it. For acrafting class, “Transmuter” was stuck with useless skills that

processed or changed the forms of minerals. There were noartifacts which helped with it, simply gloves that had theformation drawn on

them. Hajime was able to make pitfallsand walls, and he was gradually able to increase their scale;however, it was still useless in combat.

All his classmates had labeled him as useless seeing his progressafter 2 weeks. Reluctantly, he tried to accumulate knowledge.He did not see a bright future ahead, which caused him to sigh

more and more by the day.

Hajime thought, as he looked at the blue sky from the librarywindow, about whether or not he should take a trip. He waslost in his thoughts, wondering what he could learn, why hewas trying so hard for the past 2 weeks, and where he couldgo.

(Like I thought, I'd like to see Demi-humans. I can't really tell ifwe're in another world without seeing those animal ears atleast once… But they're in "The Sea of Trees~" Besides slaves,it's rare to see them outside the forest.)

To Hajime's knowledge, Demi-humans were a race that wasdiscriminated against. They lived in "Hartsenna Sea of Trees"which spread to the north and south on the east side of the continent.They were discriminated against because theylacked any magic power at all.

In ancient times, the world was created by the God Eht. Themagic used today was a degraded form of the magic from theAge of Gods. For that reason, it was believed that magic was a gift from God. At least, that was what the Saint Church taughteveryone.

For a race to not have any magical power meant they werescorned by God.

How did demons come into being, though? Demons were notgifted by God; rather, they were natural disasters. They werevermin. Hajime was inwardly disgusted by the interpretationpeople had of them.

Devils worshiped a different God. Their thoughts on Demi-

humanswere similar as well. Devils had a high aptitude formagic and could perform stronger magic with shorterincantations and smaller formations than Humans.

Humans thought Devils were the enemy because they worshipeda different God. That was what the Saint Church taught. Devilsfelt the same toward Humans. As for the Demi-humans, they were discriminated against by both sides and simply wanted tolive in peace.

(If going to “The Sea of Trees” is impossible, maybe I should headwest to the ocean. If I remember, there’s a small town calledErisen there. If I can’t see animal ears, then I’d like to see amermaid.It’s a man’s romance. I want to try the seafood, too.)

The town was off the west coast, and a group of Demi-humanfishermen lived there. This group of Demi-humans was theonly one protected by the Kingdom, and this was because 80%of theseafood the northern continent consumed came fromthis group. It was an obvious reason. Hajime wondered whereреligious doctrine and discrimination had gone with them.

When he heard the story, Hajime felt the urge to retort.

The sea lay beyond “Guryuen Desert”In the midst of the desertlay the oasis land, the Ankaji Dukedom. Nearby was “GuryuenVolcano”one of the seven Great Labyrinths.

The seven Great Labyrinths were amongst the most dangerousareas in the world. There was one within the previouslymentioned “Hartsenna Sea of Trees”as well as onesouthwest of Hairihi Kingdom, “Orcus Great Labyrinth”.

These were the three of seven known Great Labyrinths. Theothers had yet to be precisely located.

One of the proposed Great Labyrinths lay in “Raisen Gorge”which expanded from the north end to the south end of thecontinent. To the south, where snow and ice painted the landwas “Schune Snowfields”.

(In the end, the desert would be impossible… No choice but tolook for slaves in the Empire. I have no confidence I could treatsomeone as a slave, though.)

When mentioning the Empire, one always referred to the“Helsha Empire”.It was a country formed by mercenarieswhich fought a large-scale war against Devils 300 years ago.

The Empire was known for employing mercenaries and wasregarded as a militaristic nation, so adventurers often gatheredthere. It was quite a dark country, advocating the supremacyof force.

The Empire thought about how Demi-humans could be used andconcluded they were most useful as slaves.

The Helsha Empire existed to the east of Hairihi Kingdom with“Neutral Commerce City Fyuren”typically called “Fyuren”between the two. The neutral city was an independent entitythat did not rely on any single country. Using its neutrality, thecity was able to exert its efforts into economic expansion. Ifthere was anything one desired, it would likely be found in theCommerce Town.

(I can’t just run away if I want to go home. Ah, not good, it’salmost time for training!)

In the end, his thoughts were a form of escapism. Since it wasalmost time for training, Hajime left the library in a hurry. Itwas a short distance to the Royal Palace, and he could hear thehustle and bustle of the capital. There were children playingand shopkeepers advertising their goods. A distance away, hecould hear a parent scolding a child. It was a typical peacefulday.

(There doesn’t seem to be a war, they really should just returnus.)

Hajime dreamed of the impossible to escape from the depressingtimes ahead.

When Hajime arrived at the training facility, there were alreadymany students there. Somewhere chatting while others

werepracticing on their own. It seemed he had arrived earlier thanexpected.Hajime went to get a western-styled sword so hecould do some free practice.

Suddenly, from behind, something surprised Hajime, causing himto move. He rotated to avoid it but still broke out in a coldsweat. Hajime looked back with a frown, tired of this.

There he saw Hiyama Daisuke and the Villain Quartet (named byHajime). Since their training had started, they had beenmessing with Hajime whenever possible. They were half thereason he felt so depressed when training (the other half wasdue to his own incompetence.)

“Yo, Nagumo. What’re you doing? You’re useless with a sword.Seriously useless～”

“Wai, that’s mean, Hiyama! Even if it’s the truth～ Gyahahaha.”

“Why do you even bother training every day? If I was you, I’d betoo ashamed to come! Hihihi.”

“Hey, Daisuke. Since this guy’s so pathetic, why don’t we helphim with his practice?”

They laughed as if they had seen the funniest thing in the world.

“Huh? Hey now, Shinji, aren’t you too nice? Well, I’m nice, too,right? I guess I can help out～”

“Ohh, good idea. Since I’m really nice as well, I’ll help. I’m usingmy precious time, you should be thankful, Nagumo～”

Hiyama would try to take him to an area where others would notnotice while acting suspiciously kindly to Hajime. Theirclassmates would simply turn a blind eye to it.

“Nah, I’m fine by myself. You can just leave me alone.”

Hajime tried to gently refuse them.

“Haa? We’re going out of our way to help you when you’re

souseless, what are you saying? I can't have that. You should juststay quiet and thank us for helping."

As he said this, he struck Hajime in the flank. Hajime jerked, hisface distorted in pain. At that point, the Villain Quartet did nothesitate to get more violent with him. Though it wasunavoidable since they were adolescent boys who suddenlyrealized they had power, but he was obviously unhappy to bethe target of their violence. Hajime had no power to resist them, so he just clenched his teeth and bore with it.

When they finally reached an unpopulated area of the trainingfacility, Hiyama and his group rushed Hajime.

"Hey, let's hurry and start. It's time for our fun training!"

At this time, Hiyama, Nakano, Saito, and Kondo surroundedHajime who stood there and prepared himself.

"Gua!?"

At that moment, he was hit from behind. Kondo had hit Hajimewith his sword, still in its sheathe. Hajime screamed and fellface first, but they continued to press on.

"Hey, why are you sleeping now? Time to burn～ Flames, Icommand you, 'Fireball'."

Nakano cast "Fireball." Hajime, who was on the floor fromKondo's blow, could not escape due to his pain. He desperatelyrolled to the side to avoid the spell, but Saito had alreadycompleted the incantation by then.

"Winds, I command you, 'Windball'."

The wind hit Hajime directly in the abdomen, causing him to fallonto his back. Hajime vomited from the blow.

Though the magic circle was only 10 centimeters in diameter, itwas still powerful enough to knock out a pro-boxer. Theartifact he held had a high aptitude and magic power, and hehad been given it by the Kingdom. Normally, the spellsthemselves would only be used to

cook or make a lightbreeze.

“Whoa, so weak.Nagumo~ Take this seriously, got it?”

Hiyama kicked Hajime who was vomiting. Hajime did his best tocontrol himself.

The lynching, disguised as practice, continued for some time.Hajime simply grit his teeth and endured the pain whilecursing his weakness. At this point, he should have been abletocounterattack, even if he was no match for them.However, since he was small, Hajime had been poor at dealingwith such things and always backed away. He would alwaysendure it; he thought it better than fighting.

While some may have thought Hajime kind, others would thinkhim pathetic. Even Hajime was unsure of which it was.

The pain was getting unbearable; suddenly, a girl’s voice filledwith anger called out.

“What are you doing!?”

When the Villain Quartet heard the voice, they thought they werebusted, especially since the voice belonged to Kaori whoHiyama liked. However, it was not just Kaori, the rest of hergroup was there.

“Well, don’t get us wrong. We were just helping Nagumopractice.”

“Nagumo-kun!”

Kaori completely ignored Hiyama and rushed over to Hajime whowas coughing. The moment she saw his state, no one elsemattered.

“Practice, is it? Isn’t this too one sided for practice?”

“Well, that’s…”

“What a fine excuse. Even if Nagumo can’t fight, he’s aclassmate. Don’t do this again.”

“If you have that much free time, then go train yourselves.”

Not wanting to argue anymore, Hiyama and his group laughedhalf-heartedly and hastily left. Kaori healed Hajime with hermagic.

“Thanks, Shirasaki-san. You’re a life saver.”

Kaori shook her head with tears in her eyes.

“Have they always done this to you? If so, I’ll…”

Kaori’s face deformed in anger as she glared toward the directionthey left in. Hajime stopped her.

“No, it’s not always like this. I’m fine, don’t worry about it.”

“But…”

Hajime smiled at her. Though not convinced, she reluctantly let itgo.

“Nagumo-kun, if you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask. I’msure Kaori will help.”

Shizuku spoke with a wry smile as she stood by Kaori. Hajime gavehis thanks; naturally, the hero in their presence decided to bea wet blanket.

“Even so, Nagumo, you need to try harder. Being weak is noexcuse for not trying to get stronger. I heard you went to thelibrary after practice. If I was you, I would take that time totrain. Nagumo, take this more seriously. I think Hiyama andthem are just trying to correct your weak attitude.”

How should he interpret that? Hajime was stunned. Kouki was thetype of person to believe in the goodness of others, so he didnot see what was going on. He did not think people werepossible of the evils he had just witnessed. He simply thoughtthey had a good reason for acting that way. When he looked atthe situation, he felt Hajime may have been the root cause. Itseemed that was his thought process.

Kouki did not have any malice or ill intent. He was seriously tryingto give Hajime advise. Hajime did not have the energy to clearup the misunderstanding, and he felt it useless to argue with someone like Kouki.

Shizuku simply sighed and apologized to Hajime.

“Sorry. Kouki doesn’t mean any harm.”

“Ahahaha, I know, I understand.”

Hajime replied with a smile and stood up, wiping his dirty clothes.

“Training’s about to start. Let’s go.”

Hajime urged everyone to head back to the training facility.Though Kaori still looked worried, Hajime pretended not tonotice. As expected, as a man, he did not want to be babied bya girl.

When they reached the training facilities, he sighed deeply. Thefuture really did look bleak.

After training finished, they usually had free time until dinner;however, Commander Meld held them back to make anannouncement. The students wondered what he wanted tosay.Commander Meld used a deep tone to give hisannouncement.

“Tomorrow, as practical training, we will venture into ‘OrcusGreat Labyrinth’All items will be prepared. The demonsoutside the capital are completely different, so please makenote of it. Get ready! Rest for today! Dismissed!」After saying that, he quickly left. The students hustled about afterhearing the announcement. Hajime simply looked up to thesky.

(… Really bleak.)

‘Orcus Great Labyrinth.’

It was a massive den consisting of 100 floors. As one of the sevenGreat Labyrinths, the demons grew stronger as one descendedfurther. Still, it was a popular place for mercenaries andadventurers. It was a great training ground for recruits since

itwas easy to measure the strength of the demons by the actualfloor of the Labyrinth. The demons also had better qualitymagic cores than those in the wilderness.

A magic core was the heart of a demon which provided it power.The stronger the demon, the larger and better the quality.These stones were used as raw materials to make magicformations. The magic formation was drawn on a stone to casta spell; however, the stone itself could be formed into apowder to use. Using other materials for the magic formationtypically reduced the power by a factor of three.

In brief, it was better to use magic cores to power magic due toefficiency. In addition, a magic core could be utilized to maketools used in everyday life. There was a high demand for these stones, both for civilian and military applications.

As an aside, strong demons with high quality magic cores couldusually use unique magic. Unique magic did not use magicalchants or circles. Demons could not use a large variety ofmagic, but they did not require an incantation. This was thereason why demons were so dangerous.

The students and knights led by Commander Meld arrived at thetown of ‘Horuad’where adventurers rested before headinginto ‘Orcus Great Labyrinth’They used an inn managed by the Kingdom where recruits often stayed.

Hajime, who had not seen a normal room in a long time, divedinto his bed. All the rooms were designed for two, but Hajimegot a room to himself. He could be carefree here. He was notlonely at all.

Tomorrow, they would challenge the Labyrinth. This time, theywould only run through the first few floors. If it was only that,even someone as weak as Hajime would be fine behind cover.Still, he wanted to apologize for being a burden. Even so, hewas glad to be out of the city… he could not read theatmosphere.

For a while, Hajime read the demon reference book from thelibrary. It was still early, but he decided to sleep. Hajime hadalready perfected his Sleeping Skill in his school life. When hewas about to

doze off, he heard someone knock on his door.

Even if it was still early for Hajime who was used to all-nightersin Japan, it was still midnight in Tortus. Hajime was worried,thinking it might be Hiyama.

However, he relaxed when he heard the voice.

“Nagumo-kun, are you still awake? It’s me, Shirasaki. Can Ibother you for a moment?”

Eh? He froze for a moment but hurried to the door. He removedthe lock and opened the door. Kaori stood there before him ina snow-white negligee.

“… The hell’s that?”

“Eh?”

Hajime could not help but speak up when presented with such ascene. Kaori was speechless because she did not hear himwell. He

quickly gathered himself, trying not to stare at her toomuch. Though he did not have too much interest, he was stillan adolescent boy, and her current appearance was a bit toostimulating.

“Ah～ no, it’s nothing. Um, is something the matter? Did you havesomething to tell me?”

“No. It’s just, I wanted to talk to you. Am I being a bother?”

“… Come in.”

Most likely, it was about the trip tomorrow; however, Kaoriquickly shot down his thoughts. Her upturned eyes wereexplosive, super effective! She noticed the open door andheard his invitation.

“Okay!”

Without any caution, she happily entered his room. She sat at thetable near the window. Hajime unconsciously prepared tea forher while still confused, well, it was just a tea bag filled withimitation black tea. He prepared enough for the two of themand handed her a cup. Hajime took a seat across from her.

“Thank you.”

Kaori took the fake tea and happily tasted it. The moonlight thatshined through the window illuminated her presence. It was asif there was a halo around her glossy black hair; she looked like an angel. Without any lust, Hajime was fascinated by herpurity. He recovered his thoughts when he heard Kaori placeher cup down. Hajime drank his tea to calm himself, choking ashe drank too quickly. It was embarrassing.Kaori giggled. Hajime quickly started the conversation to hide his embarrassment.

“So, what did you want to talk about? Is it about tomorrow?”

Kaori nodded. Unlike her smiling face from a moment ago, shelooked as if she were brooding over something.

“About our trip tomorrow, I want you to stay here, Nagumo-kun.I’ll explain things to everyone, so please!”

She leaned over as she pleaded with him. Hajime was confused.Even if he was a burden, this seemed a bit too much.

“Um… I know I’m a burden… but since I’m already here, I don’tthink I’ll be able to just stay put.”

“That’s not it! I didn’t mean you were a burden!”

Kaori tried to clear up the misunderstanding. She thought shemay have been too hasty. She put her hand to her chest andtook a deep breath, calming herself down. She quickly andquietly apologized.

“I just have a bad feeling. When I was sleeping earlier, I had adream, and you were there. When I called out to you, youdidn’t even notice. When I chased after you, I couldn’t catchup. And at the end…”

She was afraid to speak any further. Wanting to hear the rest,Hajime urged her to continue.

“At the end?”

With a jerk, Kaori lifted her head. Hajime saw her biting her lipswith wet eyes.

“… You disappeared…”

“… I see.”

They sat in silence for a while.Hajime looked at Kaori who still had her head down. It truly was an ominous dream, but it was still just a dream. With just that,they would not allow him to stay back. If that was allowed, hewould have trouble from his classmates. He really would not be welcomed anymore. He had no choice but to go.To reassure Kaori, he spoke as gently as he could.

“A dream is just a dream, Shirasaki-san. This time, we have Meld and his veteran knights to accompany us. A lot of strong people like Amanogawa are coming, too. Rather, our whole class is amazing. I feel sorry for the enemy. I’m weak, and it’s because you’ve seen how weak I am thatyou saw that dream.”

Kaori stared at Hajime anxiously.

“Still… Still… I’m worried.”

“In that case”

Hajime stared shyly into Kaori’s eyes.

“Will you protect me?”

“Eh?”

He was aware of what he was saying, and, as a man, he feltashamed. His face was already red with embarrassment. In theroom illuminated by the moon light, Kaori understood histhoughts perfectly.

“You’re a Healer, right? You’ve got an innate talent for recovery.No matter what, even if I get injured, you can cure me. Willyou protect me with this power? I think I’ll be fine if you can.”

Kaori simply stared at him. Hajime endured his shame as best ashe could, forcing himself to maintain eye contact, even if hisbody was writhing inside.

The largest cause of a person’s insecurity was the unknown. Rightnow, Kaori was worried about what could attack him. Theyneeded the confidence to face the unknown that would attack him.

For a while, they stared at each other. The silence was brokenwhen Kaori began to smile.

“You never change, Nagumo-kun.”

“?”

Hajime had a doubtful expression. Kaori laughed seeing his face.

“Nagumo-kun, you probably think we first met in high school,but I’ve known you since the second year of middle school.”

This revelation shocked Hajime. He quickly searched through hismemories, but he could not recall their meeting. Hajimegroaned while thinking, causing Kaori to giggle.

“It was a one-sided meeting. The first time I saw you, you wereprostrating. Since you were like that, there was no way youcould have seen me.”

“P-prostrating!?”

Why had she seen him at such an uncool time? His body writhedabout again, but for a different reason this time. Where andwhen had she seen him in that position? He franticallysearched his memories again. Kaori giggled, seeing hisexpression change so oddly.

“Yeah, you were surrounded by a bunch of shady people. Evenwhen they spit at you, poured their drinks on you, or steppedon you, you didn’t budge. They eventually left.”

“I showed you something so unsightly…”

Hajime felt like dying a little. It would have been no different ifshe had seen him while he was still suffering from his 8th GradeSyndrome, which could only be described as his dark past. Hecouldonly smile without any humor. It was the same smile hehad when his mother found his hidden porn stash and placedthem neatly on his bookshelf.

Still, Kaori looked at him gently, free of contempt and ridicule.

“No, it wasn’t unsightly. Rather, I thought you were a strong, kindperson when I saw you like that.”

“Huh?”

Hajime could not believe what he heard. That was not the typicalimpression one would have. Perhaps she had a special fetish? Hajime thought something rude.

“I mean, you did it for a sakeof a child and his grandmother,right, Nagumo-kun?”

When she said that, Hajime finally remembered. There was onesuch incident during his middle school years.

A small boy accidentally hit a few delinquents, his takoyakismashing on them. The boy started to cry, and the delinquentsstarted to harass the grandmother. She had cowered in fear.By chance, Hajime had passed through the area. When shestarted taking out her wallet, his body moved on its own. Hehad never fought before; he had only practiced his special 8thGrade Syndrome moves at home. They would not be useful atall, so he prostrated himself before them. He did it in public. Itwas embarrassing for everyone there; he felt like runningaway. Even so, it went as planned and the delinquents left.

“Strong people would solve it with violence. Kouki would do that,I’m sure. But I don’t think there are many who would helpothers, even when they’re weak. I especially don’t thinkanyone would prostrate themselves for the sake of another. Iwas afraid at that time. I simply used the excuse that I was notstrong like Shizuku-chan, so I stood there and did nothing. Ijust waited for someone to help them.”

“Shirasaki-san…”

“I think you’re the strongest person I know. When I saw you inhigh school, I was happy. I wanted to become like you, to getto know you. But you always went to sleep…”

“Ahaha, sorry.”

Hajime was shy when he found out why Kaori interacted with himso much. He just laughed bitterly at the unexpectedly highopinion she held of him.

“Even if I’m a little uneasy, I’ll make sure you don’t do anythingcrazy in the Labyrinth. Like when you faced thosedelinquents.”

Kaori looked at Hajime with determination.

“I’ll protect you, Nagumo-kun.”

Hajime accepted her determination and nodded.

“Thank you.”

Immediately after, Hajime smiled wryly. The male and femaleroles had completely reversed. Without a doubt, Kaori wasplaying the hero while Hajime was the damsel in distress. Hecould not help but laugh at the odd situation.

They chatted for a few minutes before Kaori returned to herroom. While Hajime was laying on the bed, he thought overmany things. He wanted to find a way he could be useful. Hewanted to rid himself of his incompetence. It did not sit so wellhim to be so dependent on others. Hajime fell asleep with arenewed determination.

Hajime and the class was gathered around the square before theentrance to ‘Orcus Great Labyrinth’.

Everyone was a little tense and curious. For the most part, Hajimehad a bit of a complicated expression. Though he was holdinghimself in, he could not keep everything inside. Still, when looking for the entrance to ‘Orcus Great Labyrinth’he couldnot help but feel this a little fun.

He had imagined a dark, gloomy entrance, but the entrancelooked more like a museum’s atrium; there was even areception desk present. There was a smiling woman in auniform checking the people who entered and exited theLabyrinth. Apparently, it was where people had their StatusPlates checked. They would be able to record who died in theLabyrinth like this. With war approaching, they did not wanttoo many casualties.

There were many stalls lined up. The shops competed againsteach other, and it looked like a large festival.

The area was popular for earning money since there were manypeople who wanted to seriously challenge the Labyrinth.While the upper levels were popular, there were those whowanted to go even deeper. Still, there were many people whofooled around, and crime was on the rise,especially in theback alley near the Labyrinth.

With help from the AdventurerGuild, the country had established facilities to limit crime dueto the pending war. In short, the area was popular because itwas close to the Labyrinth and many could buy and sellmaterials here.

While the class looked around like people from the countryside,they followed in orderly fashion like ducklings behindCommander Meld.

The inside of the Labyrinth was completely different from thehustle and bustle outside. There was little ambient light,though a light did come from further down the passage. Thepassage itself was5 meters high and wide, and it was possibleto see to some extent, even without the aid of magical lightsor torches. Special Green Light Stones were buried in the walls,emitting light to brighten the Labyrinth. 'Orcus GreatLabyrinth'itself was a huge vein of Green Light Stones.

The group organized themselves into rank and proceededforward. For a while, nothing interesting happened, but thenthey entered a dome-shaped hall with a ceiling 7 or 8 metershigh.

As they entered, fluffy gray balls crawled out of the crevices.

"Right, Kouki, you and your party should step forward. Everyoneelse fall back! We'll take shifts on the front line. Get ready! These demons are Ratmen. They're not that strong ordangerous, but they're quick. Take things slowly!"

As he said, the Ratmen jumped at them quickly.

Their scarlet eyes shined beneath the gray fur. Their name suitedthem. Ratmen were bipedal and had muscular upper bodieswith mouse-like features. Only their chest and abdomen,which had eight-packs, were not covered in hair. It was as ifthey were showing off their abs.

The front line consisted of Koukiand his party. When Shizuku sawthe enemy, her face stiffened. The Ratmen were creepy.Kouki, Shizuku, and Ryuutarou intercepted the charging Ratmenwhile the girls close to Kaori began chanting. The two girlswere Nakamura Eri, the glasses girl, and Taniguchi Suzu, theenergetic loli-girl. They

prepared to invoke their magic, stayingin the formation they were taught.

Kouki wielded his white, shining bastard sword so quickly it washard to see the motions.

He made short work of a few enemies in no time. His sword wasone of the artifacts the Kingdom had given to them, the “HolySword.” The sword had a Light Attribute, and any enemycaught in the light the sword produced was weakened whilethe user himself was strengthened. Even if it was “Holy,” it hadterribly “Dirty” abilities.

Ryuutarou was a “Martial Artist,” so he used gauntlets and shinguards. These, too, were guards which created shock waves.

They were also thought to be unbreakable. Ryuutarou took animposing stance and did not let any enemy pass with hiscarefully aimed kicks and punches. Though he had no shield,he was much like a heavy armored tank.

Shizuku, much like her namesake of Samurai Girl, was a “Fencer”who had a weapon which was a mixture of a Shamshir and aKatana. She took a sword draw stance, cutting all enemiesbefore her in an instant. The arc was so refined the knightswere dazzled.

While the other students were fascinated by the fight, a chantresounded.

[[[Swirling dark flames, Incinerate the enemy, Return theirashes to the earth, “Spiral Flame.”]]]

Three people simultaneously cast the spell, and three spiralingflames engulfed the Ratmen. The demons gave out a shriek ofdeath as they were turned to ash.

All the Ratmen were wiped out; the other students did not get aturn. It seemed the enemies on Floor 1 were too weak forKouki’s party.

“Ahh～ yeah, good job! Next time, you guys try it; don’t loweryour guard, though!”

Commander Meld warned them not to relax, but he smiled seeingthe prowess the students displayed. Still, the tension fromtheir first experience fighting against demons in the Labyrinth could not be stopped. The students broke out in smiles.Commander Meld just shrugged his shoulders.

“This is just a training exercise, but don’t forget to keep yourmagic cores in mind. This is obviously overkill.”

Hearing Commander Meld’s words, the people in Kaori’s groupwho cast spells blushed.

There were no particular problems from there.They repeated the battles in the same manner. Everything wentwell as they advanced. Eventually, they arrived at Floor 20, theFloor whichseparated 1st class adventurers from the rest.Though their battle experience was thin, because all of themexcept Hajime were cheats, they were able to easily reach thisfloor.

Traps were the most frightening aspect of the Labyrinth. In someinstances, the traps were lethal.

There was an item called a Fair Scope used for the upper floors. Itwas a gadget which detected traps by feeling the flow ofmagic. Because most traps in the dungeon used magic, the FairScope could detect more than 80% of traps. The range wassomewhat narrow, so experience and information was stillneeded for smooth progress.

For that reason, they were able to quickly breeze through thefloors. This was mainly due to how earnestly the knightsguided them. Commander Meld, especially, warned them tocheck for traps if they did not know the layout of the area. Ifthey were unsure if traps were around, they were to remaincautious.

“All right, everyone. There will be different demons from thispoint on, and they will work together to attack. Don’t getcareless just because it’s been easy so far! After we clear Floor20, we’ll end for the day! Get ready!”

The undertone in Commander Meld’s message resounded withineveryone. Up to this point, Hajime had not done anything

inparticular. Once he practiced on a demon the knights hadweakened. He had created a pitfall for the demon to fall in andstabbed it with a sword; he had only defeated that single doglikecreature.

No one wanted him in their party, so he simply stood behind thecover of the knights. It was quite pathetic; however, byrepeatedly using Transmute in combat, he had improved hismagic power. It increased by 2 points this day, so combat itselfwas useful to him.

(I'm just a parasite player, haa~)

Again, a weakened demon was thrown to Hajime by the knights.When it approached, Hajime transmuted the ground and letout a sigh. With it restrained, Hajime swung his sword down.

(Well, at least my precision with Transmute has gone up. I'll do mybest, step by step.)

He consumed a magic pill and wiped the sweat off his brow.Hajime noticed, but some of the knights were impressed byhim.

They had not expected anything from him in the beginning. Inbattle, however, he dared to fight against the demons and didnot just stand around. Of course, the demons themselves wereweakened.

For the knights, they thought Hajime would fight using his barelyutilizedsword. Hajime had chosen to use Transmute to sealtheir movements and brought down a decisive blow; it was a reliable strategy the knights had never seen before.

"Transmuters" were a crafting class, so no one had thought ofusing Transmute in combat.

Hajime thought about using Transmute on his weapon since hehad nothing else; if he couldmanipulate minerals, why notmanipulate the ground? Since he was surrounded by so manystrong people, he felt useless having only defeated a few. Itwas his first public exhibition of histactic. He had come upwith it when his impotence

was shown up in combat trainingin the Capital.

When they stopped for a short rest, he looked forward and sawKaori looking at him. She smiled, keeping her word to“Protect” him. This embarrassed Hajime, so he looked away,which caused Kaori to sulk. Shizuku, who had observed thetwo, smiled wryly and spoke in a small voice.

“Kaori, why are you two constantly looking at each other? You’renot doing some kind of rom-com in the Labyrinth, are you? This isn’t the time.”

Kaori blushed from Shizuku’s teasing. She refuted it angrily.

“Really, Shizuku-chan, don’t say strange things! I was justwondering if Nagumo-kun was all right, that’s all!”

Shizuku knew that was not the case, but she still kept her mouthshut. She did not want to upset Kaori any further. Still, shecould not hide the laughter in her eyes, causing Kaori to sulkfurther.

Hajime looked at them from the side when he suddenly felt agaze. It was unpleasant, filled with negative emotions, and itwas glued to him. Hajime was not unfamiliar with such staresin the classroom, but the feeling here was incomparable.It was not the first time he felt this gaze, either, today. Since themorning, he had felt this stare. When he tried to locate thesource, it disappeared. Hajime was tired of it, having felt itagain and again.

(I wonder… did I do something? I thought I was doing my best,even if I am useless. Is that the cause? It’s not like I’m gettingarrogant, why the hell are you targeting me!? Haa～)

Hajime sighed deeply. He began feeling the ill omen Kaori hadmentioned.

The party continued searching through Floor 20.Each floor of the Labyrinth was several kilometers wide, so it tookdozens of people several months to map out a new level.So far, complete maps had been drawn up to Floor 47, so it wasdifficult to get lost. There was

less worry of getting caught in atrap as well.

The innermost room of Floor 20 had a complicated terrain. Thewalls protruded like a stalactite cave as icicles formed aroundthe room.

The stairs down to Floor 21 was just beyond here. If they reachedthat point, their training would end for the day. In ancienttimes, there were forms of transportation magic, but suchmagic was long gone.

They would need to head back the old-fashioned way. The partyrelaxed slightly, since they were able to walk without aproblem.

After a while, Kouki's party and Meld's group that stood at thefront stopped. The classmates, keen on what was going on,took up their fighting stance.

"Camouflage! Keep an eye on your surroundings!"

Commander Meld advised them loudly.

The wall suddenly rose and changed color. The camouflaged bodywas now dark brown, and it stood on two legs. It raised itschest and began pounding on it like a drum. Upon closerinspection, the demon looked like a gorilla with acamouflaging ability.

"Rockmounts! Careful of their arms, they're strong!"

Commander Meld's yell echoed through the cavernous room.Kouki's party advanced to engage the creatures. Ryuutarouwas able to deflect a blow that came at him while Kouki and

Shizuku tried to surround the beast. They could not positionthemselves well due to the terrain, however.When the Rockmount felt it was impossible to pass by Ryuutarou,it withdrew and took a deep breath.

Then.

“Gugagagagaaaa～～～!!”

The intense roar vibrated the entire room.

“Gu!?”

“Uwa!?”

“Kya!?”

A shock ran through their bodies. It did not damage them, butthey were frozen. This was the Rockmount’s unique magic,“Intimidating Roar.” The roar carried magic through it whichcaused a temporary paralysis.

The vanguard took the roar at almost point-blank range, causingthem to stiffen. The Rockmount took this gap in defense toattack. It lifted a boulder and threw it at Kaori and the rearguard. It used a stunning shot-put form. The rock flew towardKaori, and the frozen vanguard could not move to stop it.Kaori and her partners readied their magic wands to intercept theboulder. They did not have enough room to dodge itHowever, they were all stunned when they were about to activatetheir magic.

The boulder that was thrown was another Rockmount. It closed inon Kaori’s group, rotating while expanding its arms. It was likea Rune Diver. One could almost hear it say “Ka-o-ri-chan～”Strangely, its eyes were bloodshot and its breathing was rough.

Kaori, Eri, and Suzu unintentionally screamed and stoppedtheir magic.

“Hey, we’re in the middle of a battle!”

In a hurry, Commander Meld ran to kill the Rockmount that wasstill mid-dive. The girls apologized, but they still felt terrible.

Their faces were pale.At that time, a mass of justice, AmanogawaKouki, got mad.

“Bastard… you dare treat them like that… I won’t forgive you!”

Kouki seemed to have misunderstood why they felt bad; hethought they were afraid of their impending doom. To frightengirls like that, Kouki showed signs of anger, and the “HolySword” shined in response to his feelings.

“Myriad of Soaring Wings, Reach the Heavens, “Soaring Flash””

“Ah, idiot!”

Ignoring Commander Meld’s voice, Kouki brandished his swordoverhead and swung it down in a single motion. His chant hadmade the sword emit an intense light, and the slash releasedit. Drawing a curve, the light bisected the Rockmount withoutany resistance. The blade of light continued on until itdestroyed the back wall.

Debris lightly fell from the wall. Kouki exhaled and gave asparkling smile to the girls. He had defeated the demon thatscared them. It’s fine now! He wanted to say, but theapproaching Commander Meld smiled and smacked him.

“Hebu!?”

“You idiot. I understand how you feel, but don’t use thattechnique

in a narrow place. If the ceiling caves in, what willyou do then!”

Kouki tried to apologize. The girls approached and tried tocomfort him.

At that moment, the collapsed wall caught Kaori’s attention.

“… Eh, what is that? It’s sparkling…”

Everyone looked at the wall Kaori mentioned. In the wall werestones radiating a pale light. It was like a crystal covered inIndicolite. The girls were enchanted by the beautiful gem.

“Hoo～ That’s a Grantz Crystal. One that large is rare.”

When talking of Grantz Crystal, it was an ore like a jewel. It didnot have any specific effects, but it had an appearance whichwas popular amongst women. Rings, earrings, pendants, therewere many pieces of jewelry with such stones set in them, andthey were all well received. In fact, this very stone was one ofthe top three choices to use in a ring when proposing.

“Pretty…”

Kaori blushed, enchanted. Hajime and Shizuku were the only onesto notice.

“In that case, I’ll go get it!”

The one who spoke up and abruptly moved to it was Hiyama. Hequickly approached the wall and reached toward it.CommanderMeld panicked.

“Hey! Don’t just do what you want! We haven’t confirmed if it’ssafe or not!”

Hiyama pretended not to hear and finally arrived in front of thecrystal. Commander Meld chased after Hiyama to stop him; atthat moment, one of the knights finished his analysis with theFair Scope. He paled when he saw the results.

“Commander! It’s a trap!”

“!?”

The warning had come too late. The moment Hiyama touched theGrantz Crystal, magic spread out. The trap was set for peoplewho were so entranced by its beauty that they touched itcarelessly. That was simply the way of the world.

In the blink of an eye, the magic formation spread throughout theentire room and gradually shined brighter. It was exactly likethe

time they had been summoned.

“Withdraw! Get out of this room immediately!”

At Commander Meld’s urging, everyone began to run out of theroom, but they were not fast enough.

When the light filled the room, everyone felt a sensation offloating. The atmosphere changed, and they were slammedinto the ground.

While feeling pain in his backside, Hajime looked at thesurroundings.

Just like him, his classmates had fallen over. Commander Meld,the knights, and Kouki’s party quickly stood up and observedtheir surroundings. The magic from before was a teleportationarray. Since this magic was not possible currently, it must havebeen a trap set in ancient times.

They were all transferred to a large bridge made of stone.It was approximately 100 meters in length, and the ceiling wasabout 20 meters high. There was no river passing underneath,only the darkness could be seen. It felt like the maw of theAbyss.The bridge was about 10 meters wide, but there were nohandrails. If anyone slipped, there would be nothing to grab onto, only a head first fall awaited. The group was right in themiddle of the bridge. They could see passages on either sidethat led to stairwells, one going up and one going down.After checking the surroundings, Commander Meld issued orderswith a grim expression.

“Everyone, get up there immediately. Head to the stairs! Hurry!”

The students began moving quickly.

However, a trap in the Labyrinth was not so kind, and retreat wasnot so simple.

Suddenly, from both sides of the bridge, magic formationsappeared in a crimson torrent of magic. There was a 10 metermagic formation at the descending side, and at the ascendingstairwell, magic formations 1 meter in size.

Crimson, an eerie and complex magic formation which seemed topulse before numerous demons appeared.From the small magic formations at the stair, demons calledTraum Soldiers, small skeletons with swords, appeared. In theireyes were crimson lights, the same color as the magic

formations. In only a few seconds, there were hundreds, andthey were only increasing in number.

But despite there being hundreds nearby, Hajime felt the otherside was more dangerous.

From the 10 meter wide magic formation, a demon larger than 10meters with four legs and a helmet on its head appeared,clearly different from the other demons.

Compared to creatures they knew of, it was closest to aTriceratops. But its eyes were crimson, its sharp nails and fangsclattering, and flames were being released from the hornsgrowing through the helmet on its head.

While everyone was stunned, Commander Meld groaned.

“Impossible… A Behemoth.”

Despite being in a cold sweat, that he could react gave thestudents a sense of security, pulling them from their daze.

That thing really is bad news, isn’t it, Kouki asked CommanderMeld.

But the strongest knight of the Kingdom shivered before thisBehemoth. He lacked the calm to answer the question readily.

With a deep breath, the creature gave a terrifying roar.

“GuraaaaaAAAAA!!”

“!?”

The roar caused Commander Meld to return to his senses. Hequickly began issuing commands to everyone.

“Alan! Break through the Traum Soldiers and take the students tothe stairs! Kyle, Ivan, Gale! Bring out the best barriers you can! Stop its attack! Kouki, hurry and get to the stairs!”

“Wait a minute, Meld-san! We’ll help! That thing’s the mostdangerous, isn’t it!? We’ll…”

“Idiot! That’s a Behemoth, it’s impossible at your strength! It’s ademon from Floor 65. Even the “Strongest” adventurer fromlong ago couldn’t defeat it! Hurry and go! I can’t let you die!”

Commander Meld’s expression faltered for a moment seeing thedaunting monster before him.“I can’t just abandon you!”

Kouki responded as he stood his ground. When CommanderMeld tried to reason withKouki, the Behemoth roared andbegan charging. At this rate, the students who were retreatingwould be trampled to death.

To prevent it, the strongest of Hairihi’s military spawned multiplefull-power barriers.

[[[Repel all malice and enmity, Absolute providence from theSon of God, Herein lies a sanctuary, Enemies of God will notpass, “Heavenly Severing!!”]]]

The incantation for this spell was engraved in the highest qualitypaper which was 2 meters wide. The incantation had fourphrases to recite. Three of the soldiers cast it simultaneously,forming a barrier which could stop anything for a minute. Thehemispherical barriers shined pure-white to stop theBehemoth's charge.

The moment the Behemoth clashed with the barrier, a shockwave erupted between each of them. The entire bridge shook,and everything around the Behemoth's feet was pulverized.The retreating students screamed and fell from the artificialquake.

Traum Soldiers were monsters which showed up on Floor 38. Theywere heads above anything else they had encountered so far.The students panicked as they were sandwiched between a

monsters demon and an army of skeletons.

They advanced recklessly, without a care to keeping rank as theyrushed to the stairs. Alan tried to calm them downdesperately, but no one listened due to their terror.

Suddenly, one of the school girls was pushed from behind and fell.She groaned as she lifted her head to see a Traum Soldierbrandishing its sword.

"Ah."

The soldier swung its sword down.

Death — she thought it would come at any moment.The Traum Soldier suddenly lost its balance as its feet werepushed upward, the blade missing her and sticking into theground as a result. The earth continued moving upward like awave toward the enemy on the bridge, tripping any Traum

Soldiers along the way. Many of them fell deep into the Abyss.

Only 2 meters from the edge of the bridge, crouching down, Hajime as he exhaled heavily.

He was continuously altering the ground. Like a mudslide, themonsters were forced off the bridge into the Abyss.

Unbeknownst to him, his proficiency in transmuting hadgotten better because of his constant use. His range hadincreased as well.

However, to use Transmute, he had to kneel down to affectanything within a certain distance from where he wasactivating his ability, and with the Traum Soldiers swingingtheir swords everywhere, Hajime was secretly full of tensionand fear.

While drinking a magic potion, Hajime quickly approached the girlwho fell. He helped her up and spoke with a smile.

“Go on. It’s fine, if you calm down, these skeletons are

nothing.Everyone else here's a cheat but me, after all!"

Hajime pat her on the back full of confidence; the next moment,she energetically thanked him.

Hajime had ruined the footing of the surrounding Traum Soldiersand detained them. He took that moment to survey thebattlefield.

Everyone was in a hectic state as they fought without thinking,looking sloppy in the process. At this rate, it was likelysomeone would die. Alan was trying to reorganize them, but itwas not going well. More Traum Soldier reinforcements camefrom the magic circles.

"We need a strong leader to guide us, Amanogawa-kun!"

Hajime started to sprint toward Kouki's party.

The Behemoth was still charging at the barrier, producing apowerful shock wave with every collision which caused thebridge to groan. There were already cracks in the barriers; itwas only a matter of time before they gave in. CommanderMeld joined in and helped reinforce them, but that was simplyadding a drop of water to the bucket.

"Not good, it won't hold on for much longer! Kouki, hurry andretreat! You guys, too!"

“No, I won’t abandon you! We’ll all survive this!”

“Ku, to think you’d be so egotistical at this moment…”

Commander Meld had a bitter expression. In such a narrowspace, it would be difficult to avoid the Behemoth’s charge.

The best option was to withdraw, since they would betrampled without the barrier. Still, this could only be seen fromexperience, so it was unlikely for anyone in Kouki’s party tohave such insight.

Meld was urging them to withdraw, but could only give them avery brief reason. Kouki refused to accept this advice to“abandon” them. From the look in his eyes, Kouki truly wantedto challenge the Behemoth.

Perhaps his adolescent mind overestimated himself, since he wasbeing praised by so many.

“Kouki! Listen to what the Commander is saying and retreat!”

Shizuku, who understood the situation, grabbed Kouki’s arm.

“Heh, this isn’t the first time Kouki’s been unreasonable! I’ll backyou up!”

“Thanks, Ryuutarou!”

Ryuutarou’s words only fueled Kouki’s attitude. Shizuku could nothelp but click her tongue.

“Fool! Don’t get so caught up in the situation!”

“Shizuku-chan!”

Kaori was worried seeing Shizuku so irritated. At that time, a boyjumped out in front of Kouki

“Amanogawa-kun!”

“N-Nagumo!?”

“Nagumo-kun!?”

Everyone was surprised to see how serious Hajime was.

“Hurry and retreat! You need to help everyone!”

“What is this? Why are you even here? This isn’t a place for youto be! Just leave this to us, Nagumo…”

“Is this the situation to be saying that!?”

Hajime had an unexpected force in his words that stopped Kouki.They had never heard Hajime speak so harshly. He alwayspresented himself with a smile, so this was shocking to them.

“Can’t you see what’s going on? Everyone’s panicking becausetheir leader is missing!”

Hajime pointed toward the students while one hand was grabbingKouki’s collar.

In the direction he pointed at were their confused classmates,surrounded by Traum Soldiers. The training drilled into themwas nowhere to be seen as they fought recklessly. Since theywere so inefficient, they were being overwhelmed by thereinforcements. Though their stats were high and protectedthem, that would soon not matter.

“We need an attack that will break through them! A power toerase their fear! You’re the only one with that power! Don’tjust look in front of you, keep an eye out behind you, too!”

Stunned to see his classmates in chaos, Kouki could only trembleand nod.

“I understand! I’ll go immediately. Sorry, Meld-san!”

“Go—!”

The barrier broke the moment Commander Meld look back atKouki’s retreat. The raging shock wave caused by thedestruction of the barrier shot straight toward Hajime and theothers.

Hajime quickly stepped forward and transmuted a wall, but thatwas easily brushed aside. He had weakened the shock wave,however. Dust whirled about as the Behemoth bellowed.On the ground, Commander Meld and the three knights laygroaning. They had taken damage from the shock wave andwere unable to move. Kouki and his party had fallen over, butthey quicklyrecovered. Hajime’s wall had been useful in aidingthose behind Meld.

“Ryuutarou, Shizuku, can you buy me some time?”

Though they were in some pain, the two pressed forward atKouki’s request. Since Commander Meld had been disabled, itwas up to them to do something.

“I’ll do what I can!”

“… I’ll manage somehow!”

Both of them rushed toward the Behemoth.

“Kaori, heal Meld-san and his men!”

“Got it!”

Kaori quickly went to work. Hajime was already beside Meld,creating stone walls to prevent the effects of battle fromreaching them. Though it seemed useless, it was better thannothing.

At that moment, Kouki began chanting to perform his strongestskill.

“Oh Divine will! Perish all evil with your light! Breath of God!Blow away the ominous clouds and purify this world! Mercy ofGod! Forgive all sins with this strike! ‘Heaven’s Might!’.”

An aurora gushed from the “Holy Sword” after he completed hischant. The skill was similar to “Soaring Flash,” but its powerwas on a completely different level. It gouged out parts of the

bridge as it shot toward the Behemoth, shaking the bridgewith its might.

After the chant, Ryuutarou and Shizuku had already cleared away;however, after fighting the Behemoth, they were in tatters;they had suffered a considerable amount of damage in a short

period of time.

The bombardment of light hit the Behemoth directly. Light filledthe area where the spell hit the demon. An earthquakeresounded along the bridge as cracks appeared all over.

“If it’s this… Haa, haa…”

“Did that do it?”

“I hope so.”

Ryuutarou and Shizuku returned to Kouki’s side. Kouki wasbreathing heavily after using an enormous amount of magic, itwas his trump card. Meanwhile, Kaori had finished treating the

soldiers, and Commander Meld and his men were beginning tostand.

When the light and dust settled down…

There it stood…

The unscathed Behemoth.

The beast sent a death glare at Kouki and growled. It raised itshead. Its horns glowed red, emitting a high pitched noise. TheBehemoth’s

helmet looked like magma.

“Don’t just stand there! Move!”

Commander Meld’s voice brought them back to reality, urgingthem to move. The Behemoth rushed at them with its newlyenhanced helmet. Like a falling meteorite, the Behemothcharged head first toward Kouki.

Even if they were able to jump aside and avoid it, the shock wavefrom the impact blew them away. By the time they stoppedrolling, they were wounded all over.

Commander Meld, who was finally able to move, rushed over. Theother knights were still being treated by Kaori as theBehemoth braced itself and worked to pull out its stuck head.

“Can you guys move?”

All he got in response were groans. They were likely paralyzed bythe shock wave. The damage to their internal organs wassurely significant.

Commander Meld called out to Kaori; when he was looking forher, he caught sight of Hajime.

“Kid! Take Kaori, carry Kouki, and retreat!”

The Commander issued orders to Hajime.Kouki, just Kouki, carry him and retreat. The knights would not beable to run away. Commander Meld clenched his teeth andgrasped his shield. He chose to risk his life to hold back thebeast.

At such a desperate moment, Hajime gave him a suggestion. Itwas possibly the only means of saving everyone; however, thechances were low, and Hajime would be in the most danger.Meld hesitated, but the Behemoth was ready for combat. Itshelmet was sizzling red hot; they had no time.

“Are you really going to do this?”

“I’ll do it!”

Commander Meld saw Hajime’s resolute gaze and could not helphimself from smiling.

“Can’t believe I’m leaving this to you. I’ll definitely come back tosave you!”

“Right!”

Commander Meld headed toward the Behemoth and released asimple magic to provoke it. The Behemoth had the habit ofattacking anything targeting it. Man and beast stared at

oneanother.

When the helmet was finally completely burning, the creaturecharged forward and leaped. Commander Meld stood poised,provoking it to the last second. At that moment, a smallincantation was heard.

“Blow and scatter, ‘Wind Wall!’”

He stepped back at that time.

Like a comet, the Behemoth landed where Commander Meld wasjust moments before. The “Wind Wall” was able to deflect theshock wave and debris of the impact. Since it was a simple

attack, Commander Meld was able to avoid it. If he wasprotecting Kouki and the others, he would have beencompletely annihilated.

Again, the Behemoth’s head was stuck. Hajime moved forward,despite being burned by the remnants of the Behemoth’sflames. He endured the pain and began chanting. Rather thana chant, he simply called out the spell’s name.

‘”Transmute!’”

As the Behemoth tried to pull its head free from the stone, stonein the surroundings buried its head further. No matter howmuch earth it destroyed to free itself, Hajime repaired it with

Transmute.

Bracing its legs, the Behemoth tried to pull itself free forcefully,but Hajime transmuted the earth about its feet. He constantlyhardened the ground, forcing the beast 1 meter into the stone.Even so, cracks formed as a result of the Behemoth's terrifyingpower. In order to prevent this, Hajime did not let up andcontinuously modified the area. He observed as the Behemothstruggled to get free. For anyone else, this would have lookedodd.

In the meantime, Kaori and the recovered knights had gathered tocarry Kouki's party back. The students fighting the TraumSoldiers had managed to regain their composure and werecooperating due to the guidance of the girl Hajime had savedbefore. It was yet another simple contribution from him.

"Wait! Nagumo-kun is still back there!"

Kaori protested to Commander Meld who was withdrawing.

"This plan is his! We're clearing out the soldiers and making asafety zone, we'll bombard the beast with magic! We'll givehim time to retreat! He can fall back when we're attacking!"

"Then let me stay and help him!"

"No! Your healing is needed to back Kouki up!"

“But!”

Commander Meld shouted to stop Kaori from protesting further

“Don’t let his efforts be in vain!”

“!?”

Including Commander Meld, the one with the highest power was,without a doubt, Kouki. If she did not use her magic effectively,they may very well lack the power to stop the Behemoth. For

this reason, it was necessary for her to join the retreatinggroup. They did not have time to stop and heal with slowermeans, and if they were not fast enough, Hajime would runout of Mana to trap the Behemoth.

“Breath of Heaven, Fill them to the brim, Purify and Heal,‘Heaven’s Blessing!’”

Kaori spun her staff while chanting with a face on the verge oftears. While wielding the long white staff which was herartifact, a pale violet light enveloped Kouki. She hadsimultaneously used magic to heal his wounds as well as revivehis magic power.

Commander Meld placed a hand on Kaori’s shoulder and

nodded.Again, she turned back to see Hajime transmuting to fightagainst the Behemoth. They all began retreating after that.

The number of Traum Soldiers still increased, numbering neartwo-hundred at this point. They all filed up near the stairs.In a sense, this was a good thing, since a larger opening wouldlead to the students being surrounded.

Luckily, there had not been a single death; this was thanks to theearnest knights who protected them. It was no exaggeration tosay they were desperately covering the students' lives. Theexpense came in the form of wounds, though.If the students lost the knights' support, for they who were onlygrowing more frantic, they would fall in only a few minutesDespair struck those who realized this. The group who cooperatedwith the girl Hajime saved before, despite fighting bravely,were at their wits end.

When they thought they were about to die…

"'Soaring Flash!'"

A pure white light exploded through the ranks of the TraumSoldiers.

The skeletons near the edges of the bridge were blown into theAbyss, only to be filled with more skeletons. Still, they hadseen the stairwell leading to the floor above. Though they hadseen it, the path was blocked by a sea of swords.

“Don’t give up, everyone, I’ll open up a path!”

Kouki yelled those words as “Soaring Flash” tore through theenemy. The students were energized by Kouki’s charisma.

“What have you guys been doing this whole time? Rememberyour training and work together! Idiots!”

The leader everyone relied on released a “Soaring Flash.” Hisvoice had strength in it, and his body was filled with power ashis mind cleared up. Kaori’s magic was doing its job as she hadused magic to calm him down. It was a magic used forrelaxation, but it was extremely effective with Kouki’s

performance.

Anyone with an aptitude for healing began to help with recovery.Those with a high aptitude for magic formed the rear guardand began chanting. The vanguard formed a firm rank andsteadily moved, putting an emphasis on guarding the rear.

The knights who had recovered also joined in, signaling for acounterattack. The cheat class began fighting, descendingupon their enemy like a surging wave. The demons fell quickly,surpassing even the rate at which they spawned.Soon, the path to the stairwell was open.

“Everyone, forward! We need to secure the stairs!”

Kouki began running as he shouted.Shizuku and Ryuutarou, now recovered, accompanied him. Theycut through the Traum Soldiers surrounding them.

Finally, they broke through. Kouki quickly cast magic to preventthe open gap along the bridge from being filled.

The classmates looked doubtful. In front of them were the stairs,it was natural they wanted to get to safety.

“Everyone, wait! We still need to save Nagumo-kun! He’s holdingback that monster on his own!”

Kaori’s classmates looked at her doubtfully. They all thought itimpossible, since he was useless.

But when they looked at the bridge, Hajime really was there.

“What’s he doing?”

“He’s burying that demon!”

Commander Meld answered the students’ question.

“It’s true! It’s because he was stopping that thing that we

couldretreat! Vanguard, don't let any Soldier near us! Rear guard,prepare your long range magic! He'll run out of magic soon, weneed to bombard the Behemoth and give him time toretreat!"

The students braced themselves. There were many who looked tothe stairs in regret. They hadjust escaped near-deathexperience, after all. Naturally, they wanted to get to safety;however, Commander Meld angrily shouted for them to returnto battle.

Amongst them was Hiyama Daisuke. Though he thought so highlyof himself, he was scared, he wanted to run away as quickly ashe could.

At that moment, he recalled the scene from the night before.When they were staying back at Horuad, he was overcome withanxiety and could not sleep. He went out to get some air. Thecool breeze helped him relax, but, as he returned to his room,he saw Kaori in her negligee.Instinctively, he held his breath,never having seen her in such a state before. Kaori passed by

without noticing him. Daisuke was curious and followed heruntil she stopped in front of a certain room and knocked onthe door. The one to answer the door was… Hajime.

Hiyama's mind went blank. He liked Kaori; however, he did notthink he was good enough for her. Compared to Kouki, he wasout of his league, so he gave up.But Hajime was different. Daisuke thought Hajime was inferior. Tosee Hajime in Kaori's presence was odd. He wondered why he

himself would not do if Hajime was good enough. Daisuke feltevery bit of it was true.

His dissatisfaction against Hajime had always piled up, and now ithad become hatred. When he saw Kaori mesmerized by theGrantz Crystal, he moved, driven by these feelings.

Hiyama remembered all of this as he watched Hajime suppressthe Behemoth on his own and Kaori staring at Hajime, prayingfor him in worry… a dark smile bloomed on his face.

Hajime felt his magic running out, and he had run out of all hispotions. He quickly surveyed his surroundings and noticedeveryone had retreated. Ranks were being formed, and magicwas being chanted for the final part of the plan.

The Behemoth was still struggling; the encasement would last afew seconds, even if he stopped transmuting. In themeantime, he needed to take some distance. A drop of sweatentered Hajime's eye; he had never been in a situation thatwould make his heart pound so chaotically that he could hearit.

Timing was of the utmost importance now. Cracks appeared inthe restraints holding theBehemoth, and they were failing tohold it back. At that moment, Hajime began to sprint.

Only 5 seconds after Hajime began running, the Behemoth freeditself and roared. The rage in its eyes was clear for all to see. Itquickly searched for its sworn enemy and found Hajime. TheBehemoth cried in anger and gathered its power into its legsto chase after Hajime.

However, a barrage of magic stopped it.

Like shooting stars painting the night sky, magic of varying colorsbombarded the Behemoth. There was no damage, but theforce prevented it from advancing.

I can do it! Hajime lowered his head and dashed forward whiletaking care not to fall. Even with all the lethal spells passingover his head, Hajime was not afraid for his life. There was noway the cheats would miss. The distance between he and theBehemoth was also 30 meters.

Hajime felt more relaxed.

However, something caused him to freeze.

One “Fireball” in the endless stream of spells bent slightly andheaded his way. It was clearly aimed at him.

(Why!?)

Doubt and bewilderment, all this ran through his mind.Hajime slid and braced himself as the “Fireball” struck the groundbefore him. He was blown back from the shock wave. He hadnot received any damage, but his balance was off. Hissemicircular canals had been affected.

Though he could stand, it was difficult to remain steady…The Behemoth was not going to go down alone. When Hajimestood, the beast roared again. Hajime looked at the creature

and was stunned by its piercing gaze. For the third time, itaimed its hornsAnd it lunged at Hajime, its horns blazing.

He was dizzy, his vision was hazy, and the Behemoth loomedbefore him. He could hear the anxious screams of hisclassmates in the distance.

Hajime desperately tried to jump away. A furious shock rippedthrough the entire bridge from the powerful attack. Crackspread out. The bridge screamed.

Finally, it collapsed.

The bridge gave way.

“Guaaa!?”

The Behemoth desperately clawed about, trying to look for aplace to hold on to. However, even the ground connected tothe bridge collapsed and fell into the Abyss. Its death throescould be heard.

Hajime crawled up to escape, but even the place he was holdingonto collapsed.

(Ahh, not good…)

While he thought that, he turned and gazed at his classmates. Hesaw Shizuku and Kouki holding Kaori back as she seemed towant to jump after him. His other classmates had their handsover their eyes or their mouths, pale. Commander Meld andthe knights looked mortified.

The scaffolding holding him crumbled. He fell backward into thedark Abyss as he tried to grasp at the dimming light.

The death throes echoing from the Behemoth soon ceased; thestone

bridge made a huge rattling noise as it crumbled. Hajimedisappeared into the Abyss along with the rubble.That sight, played in front of Kaori in slow motion, filling her withdespair.

In her head, the previous night's event repeatedly played itself inher mind.

In a room illuminated by the moonlight, she sat chatting withHajime as they drank a fake black tea. It was the first time theyhad talked so intimately with each other.

Driven by her nightmares, she had suddenly paid a visit toHajime's room. Even if he was surprised, he had talked to hertruthfully. After a short talk, she noticed her uneasiness hadbeen erased.

She returned to her room in a jubilant mood. When she arrived,she noticed how boldly she was dress and writhed in shame. Itwas slightly depressing that Hajime had not even reacted, inher eyes, to her looks; she felt she lacked appeal. When Kaorisaw Shizuku making funny facial expression, she wanted topretend it never happened.

It was an important promise she made that night.

The most important event that night was the promise she madeto "Protect Hajime." It was a promise he made to relieve Kaoriof her anxiety. She recalled this memory again as she sawHajime disappear into the Abyss.

Somewhere in the distance, a scream could be heard. When Kaorinoticed it was her own voice, she grimaced and quicklyreturned to reality.

“Let go! If I don’t go to Nagumo-kun! I promised! I, I said I’dprotect him! Let me go!”

Shizuku and Kouki were restraining Kaori since she looked as ifshe wanted to jump after him. The extraordinary power shedisplayed made them wonder how she had gotten suchstrength despite her slender frame. Unluckily for them, sheused her momentum to try to break free from them.

If she continued to struggle like this, she may have harmedherself. Nevertheless, she would jump off the cliff. She did nothave her usual calmness in her frenzy.

“Kaori! You can’t, Kaori!”

Shizuku understood her feelings, so it was difficult to find theright words. All she could do was desperately call out Kaori’sname.

“Kaori! Are you trying to die? It’s too late for Nagumo! Calmdown! You’ll hurt yourself!”

Kouki tried his best to convey his worry for her. However, those is not the correct words to say here.

“What do you mean? Nagumo-kun isn’t dead yet! I need to go,I’m sure he needs help!”

Nagumo Hajime was beyond salvation, or at least that was whateveryone else thought. He fell from the cliff into the darkAbyss.

But Kaori lacked the composure necessary to accept this reality. Ifanyone was to word it, she would deny it again and again.

Ryuutarou and the others stood there confused, not knowingwhat to do.

At that moment, Commander Meld approached and struck Kaoriin the back of the neck silently. She jerked for a moment thenfell into his arm unconscious. Kouki held the limp Kaori andglared at Meld. When he was about to start complaining,Shizuku preemptively bowed and showed her gratitude.

“I’m sorry. Thank you.”

“Don’t… Don’t thank me. I can’t let another person die. We’releaving this place. I leave her to you.”

“Say no more.”

As she watched him leave, she walked to Kouki and grabbedKaori. Kouki still looked disappointed that he was interrupted.

“We couldn’t stop her, so Meld had to. You understand, right?We don’t have any time. Before she starts affecting everyoneelse, we needed to stop her from breaking down. You need tolead the way so we can get out of this. I’m sure Nagumo-kunwould have said the same.”

Kouki nodded.

“You’re right, let’s hurry.”

They had seen one of their classmates die before their eyes. Itwas enough to be engraved into their very souls. Everyonelooked at where the bridge used to be with a stupefiedexpression. One girl cried out, “No more!”and sat down.Just like Hajime had said, the group needed a leader.

Kouki raised his voice toward his classmates.

“Everyone! Think only about surviving. We’re withdrawing!”

The students moved sluggishly in response to his words. Themagic formations spawning the Traum Soldiers were stillactive, and their numbers were increasing slowly. With theirmental state, fighting would be reckless, and it was no longernecessary to fight. Kouki shouted at his classmates to urgethem to escape. Commander Meld and his knights also workedto encourage them.

Eventually, everyone reached the stairs. The stairwell to the upperfloor was long. It climbed so high they could see nothing elsebut the darkness. They felt like they had gone more than 30floors at that point. Even if their bodies were enhanced bymagic, they could still feel the fatigue. Wounds from theirearlier battle were still present as well, and it did not help thatthe stairs were long and dimly lit, worsening the gloomyatmosphere.

At this time, Meld considered taking a small break but stoppedwhen he saw a large wall with a magic formation drawn on it.The students regained their vitality. Commander Meld quicklyapproached the wall and began investigating it. They did notforget to use the Fair Scope.

From their investigation, it was unlikely this was a trap; theformation was left as a means to move the wall before them.

Commander Meld began to chant as he poured his magic intothe formation. Like a hiddendoorway, the door rotated andshowed the room behind it.

They had returned to the room on the 20th floor.

“We returned?”

“We made it back!”

“We did it… we’re back…”

One after another, sighs of relief could be heard. There were afew students who burst into tears and others who just fellover. Even Kouki and his party who were leaning against thewall wanted to sit down. They were still in the Great Labyrinth,though, so monsters could appear. Theyneeded to escapebefore they could truly rest.

Commander Meld suppressed his own desire to rest andhardened his heart, shouting a the students to get up.

“Everyone! Stand up! If you get tired here, you won’t be able toreturn! We’re escaping as quickly as we can and avoidingcombat. Just endure, a little longer!”

For the students who wanted to rest more, they could only starein silent protest. Everyone reluctantly stood up. Kouki hid hisfatigue and took point. On their way out, the knightsconcentrated on fighting as little as possible. They raced to theentrance in one stretch.

Finally, they reached the Floor 1 and saw the nostalgic entrance.They had not even been in the Great Labyrinth for a single day,yet it felt like it had been a long time since they had last seen

sunlight.

This time, the students truly looked relieved. There were somesprawled out in front of the gate square. All of them werehappy to have survived.

Still, some students did not feel this way. Shizuku, who was stillcarrying the unconscious Kaori, Kouki, Ryuutarou, Eri, Suzu,and the girl Hajime saved had a dark look.

Commander Meld wanted to make a report while minding thestudents.

There was a new dangerous trap on Floor 20. Since the bridge hadcollapsed, there was no way of knowing what the purpose ofthe trap was, but he still needed to make the report. He couldnot help but report Hajime's death as well. Commander Meldwas having a difficult time not showing his depression. Hecould no help but sigh.

When the group returned to Horuad, they immediately went totheir rooms. Some talked to one another, but most collapsedand fell asleep.

Hiyama Daisuke, however, left the inn and sat in a corner of thetown. He chose an inconspicuous place to sit as he hugged hisknees with his face buried between them. If his classmatessaw him,they would think he was depressed that someonehad passed away.

But…

"Hihihihi, it, it was his fault! For a small fry… he, he got carriedaway… I, it was divine punishment! I'm not wrong… It was allfor Shirasaki… There's no need to think about… that small fry…

I’m not wrong… hihihi!”

He tried to justify his actions, his smile dark and his eyes dull.The Fireball which veered off course and hit Hajime was cast bynone other than Hiyama.

The escape to the stairwell and Hajime’s actions to save them, thesight of Hajime and Kaori’s night rendezvous, Hiyama heard adevil whisper to him. If I kill him now, no one will notice. At

that time, he sold his soul to that devil.

So as not to be discovered, Hiyama timed his shot carefully andguided his Fireball toward Hajime.

In that chaotic barrage, it would be difficult to work out who castwhat spell. He chose fireball because his aptitude lay in wind.

There would be no evidence or sign of suspicion.

Hiyama told himself all this as he laughed darkly.At that moment, someone called out to him.

“Heh～ So it really was you. The first murder in this world goes toa fellow classmate… You did well!”

“Wh, who’s there?”

Hiyama backed away in a panic. The one who hailed him was afellow classmate.

“Y, you, what are you doing here?”

“Don’t worry about that. Rather… Murderer? How do you feel? How’s it feel to kill off a love rival in this confusion?”

The person laughed, as if watching a comedy. Hiyama said tohimself that a classmate had died yet this person did not evencare. Everyone else was shocked, save for the person beforehim.

“… Is this your true nature?”

The stunned Hiyama muttered to himself.A condescending scoff came as his answer.

“Nature?Nothing that complicated. Isn’t it common to have afew secrets? Rather… what would happen if I spread thisinformation? Especially… if she heard it.”

“Th, that’s… No one would believe it… and where’s yourevidence?”

“None, but they would believe me. At the moment, do you

thinkyour own words would be good enough?”

Hiyama was cornered. The person’s words were teasing thisalready weakened mouse. No one would possibly foresee sucha change in personality. Daisuke could hardly believe thisperson had such a contrasting personality. The person lookingdown with a sadistic face sent chills throughout Daisuke’sbody.

“Wh, what do you want!?”

“Hm? How regrettable. It’s like I’m threatening you, isn’t it? Fufu, it’s not like I want anything from you right now. All youneed to do for now is be my hands and feet.”

“Th, that’s…”

It was like declaring he would be a slave. Naturally, Hiyamahesitated. He wanted to refuse, but if he did so, this personwould mercilessly spread the rumor about his deed.Hiyama thought, “This one, too,”but the person read histhoughts.

“You want Shirasaki Kaori, don’t you?”

“Wh, what did you say?”

Hiyama’s gloomy thoughts were blown away in an instant as hestared at the person. The person smirked and continuedtempting

him.

“If you follow me… one day, she will be yours. I was going toapproach Nagumo-kun with this offer,but you killed him. Youmay be more suitable, anyway, so I guess it worked out in theend.”

“… What’s your objective? What do you want to do?”

In this situation he was ignorant of, he unknowingly raised hisvoice.

“Fufu, it has nothing to do with you. I’m looking for something,that’s all I’ll say… So, your answer?”

Hiyama did not want to put this person off and ignored theattitude of treating him like an idiot into his memory. Daisukewas afraid of this drastic change in character, and he did nothave much choice otherwise, so he nodded.

“… I’ll do it.”

“Ahahaha, that’s good. Having to blame my own classmatewould be painful. Well then, let’s get along, Murderer! Ahahaha!”

Hiyama watched as the person returned to the inn with a happylaugh.

Even if he wanted to forget the whole thing, it would notdisappear with his denial. What kind of words would articulateKaori's feelings as she saw Hajime fall into the Abyss?

Right now, while all the students who were tired slept like logs,Hajime's death in the Abyss served only to clarify Kaori'sfeelings. She had never taken care of Hajime out of good will.

Seeing Kaori now, his actions had only served to make her awareof her own feelings. Hiyama had jeopardized himself with histhoughtless actions.

He would need to conduct himself in order to secure his place.Hiyama had already crossed the line. It was too late to stop.According to the person from before, there was even thepossibility he would get Kaori.

"Hihi, it'll be all right. Everything will go well. I'm not wrong…"

Hiyama returned to his previous pose and began mumbling tohimself again. This time, not a single person bothered him.

Chapter 2

Zaaa, the sound of running water. A cool breeze brushed against his cheek, causing him to tremble. There was a solid sensation along his face and a chill along the lower half of his body. Hajime groaned as he woke up.

While in a daze, he put his effort into sitting upright as his entire body throbbed in pain.

「Ow, this… I definitely…」

Holding his unsteady head with one hand, he studied the vicinity whilst recalling what happened. Though the surroundings were dim, thanks to the light emitted by the Green Light Stones, it was not as if he was blinded by darkness. In front of Hajime was a river about 5 meters in width, and his lower body was submerged within. Hajime's upper body had been caught on the rocks protruding along the side of the river.

「Yeah… I fell down the broken bridge… and…」 His foggy head began turning its gears again. Hajime had survived the drop by sheer luck.

In the midst of his fall, he encountered a cliff with a small opening where a small amount of water broke free and caused a flood. There were countless waterfalls here, and they had blown Hajime to and fro until he was thrust into a small tunnel which was like a water slide.

It was an unbelievable miracle. As he flew out of the tunnel, Hajime had hit his head and lost consciousness. Hajime did not know how such a miracle had taken place.

「Anyway, I'm alive… It, it's cold…」

He was submerged in the cold underground water this entire time, so his entire body was cold. At this rate, he could very well catch hypothermia, so Hajime quickly picked himself up. While shivering,

he took off his clothes and wrung them out.

Using Transmute, he created a single sheet of paper. On the hard stone floor he started to engrave a magic circle.

「Too cold to concentrate…」

He wanted to use “Ember.” It was a simple magic even children could perform with a 10 centimeter magic formation.

At this moment, he had no magic cores to increase his lacking aptitude in magic. As such, Hajime needed a more complicated formula larger than 1 meter in diameter. After 10 minutes, he was able to finish the magic formation and began chanting.

「I seek fire, The power of light, Manifest, “Ember…” Why is there such an exaggerated chant to create such a simple flame? It’s embarrassing…」

Sighing had become a habit recently. Still, he invoked the fist-sized flame and bathed in its warmth. He set his clothes side by side near the flames to dry them.

「I wonder where I am… I think I fell a long way… Can I even get back?」

He could feel himself calm down as he warmed himself with the fire.

Anxiety gradually overtook him. Hajime wanted to cry, tears were forming in his eyes, but he bore with it so as not to fall apart. He wiped away the tears that had collected and slapped his own cheeks.

「No choice, I need to find my way back. I’ll be fine, I’m sure I’ll be fine.」

Hajime had a determined face as he encouraged himself while staring at the flames.

After 20 minutes, his clothes were dry and warm, so Hajime set off. He was not sure which floor he was at, but he was definitely in the

Great Labyrinth. It would not be strange for demons to be lurking here. He carefully walked down a huge passage leading into the depths.

The passage that Hajime continued on felt like a cave.

The size was incomparable to before. The complicated passage full of obstacles was 20 meters in diameter. Even the more narrow places were still 10 meters in diameter. Although it was not an easy path to tread, there were many places to hide, so Hajime advanced stealthily from hiding area to hiding area.

How long had he walked for?

Hajime began to feel fatigued when he reached a fork for the first time. A huge crossroad was presented to him. While hiding behind a boulder, Hajime wondered which path he should take.

He took a moment to think over it. He thought he saw something at the edge of his vision and quickly hid behind a nearby rock.

Quietly he stuck his head out and waited; from the passage ahead, a white fur ball hopped into view. It had long ears, and it looked like a rabbit. However, it was about the size of a mid-sized dog, and its hind legs were heavily muscled. The “rabbit” had several crimson lines running along its body like blood vessels which pulsated like a heartbeat. It was an eerie sight.

Clearly, it was a dangerous demon. Hajime decided to avoid it by going left or right instead of going straight ahead. Since the “rabbit” was nearby, he could not head to the right passage. Hajime held his breath and waited for the time to move. At that moment, the rabbit turned around and started to sniff theground. Now! He tried to move.

The rabbit seemed to react and quickly straighten its back to stand up. It’s vigilant ears rustled.

(Shit! D, did it find me? Am, am I safe?)

He pushed his body against the boulder to hide himself while trying to control his thumping heart. Those keen ears felt like they could

pick up his pulse; he broke out into a cold sweat at that thought.

Luckily, the rabbit was alert for a different reason. 「Guraaaaa!」

A wolf-like demon with white hair jumped out at the rabbit and growled.

The white wolf had two tails and was the size of a large dog. Just like the rabbit, the wolf had the same pulsating crimson lines all over its body. Afterward, two more wolves jumped out from behind different stones to join it.

No matter how one looked at it, the wolves were going to prey on Rabbit- chan (though it wasn't cute enough to attach "chan.") Hajime half rose to his feet using the confusion as cover.

However…

「Kyuu!」

A cute cry leaked from the rabbit's mouth as it jumped into the air and rotated.. The rabbit gave a roundhouse kick with its massive legs and smacked the first wolf.

Dopan!

The kick generated a sound that was impossible to think of. Rabbit-chan got a clean kick to the two-tailed wolf's head.

Then,

Gogya!

There was a resounding echo, and Hajime could see the wolf's neck had been bent into the wrong direction.

Hajime went rigid.

Using the centrifugal force from the roundhouse kick, the kicking rabbit rotated in the air until it was upside -down. The kicking rabbit stomped the air and fell toward the ground like a meteor. Just before landing, it rotated in a perpendicular direction and gave

a powerful heel drop to the wolf close to the landing point.

Begya!

Without even getting the chance to give off a death cry, both the wolves' heads were pulverized.

Another two wolves appeared to jump at the kicking rabbit when it landed.

Hajime thought the kicking rabbit would lose at this moment. Still, the rabbit was able to do a handstand while rotating its legs, just like a break dancer. Both the wolves were flung away and slammed into the rocks from the tornado-like rotating kicks. Blood covered the walls as their corpse trailed down.

The last wolf ruffled its tails as it growled. Soon the tails started to discharge electricity. It was trying to cast a unique magic.

「Guraaaaa!!」

Lightning flew at the kicking rabbit along with its howl.

But as the high-speed lightning approached, the kicking rabbit avoided it wonderfully by taking steps in one direction then the other. When the lightning dissipated the kicking rabbit drove a somersault kick into the wolf's jaw in one go. The kick blew the wolf away, and it landed on the ground with its neck broken from the force.

The kicking rabbit, 「Kyu!」

A victory cry? The kicking rabbit raised its forelimbs and brushed off its ears.

「Maman, please tell me this is a lie.」

Hajime could only smile dryly as he stood still. This was dangerous. The Traum Soldiers the students had trouble with were toys compared to this rabbit. The kicking rabbit may have been stronger than even the Behemoth who could only attack monotonously.

He knew it would be certain death if he were caught, which caused him to step back.

But that was a mistake. Karan.

The noise echoed throughout the cavern.

Hajime had kicked a pebble near his feet. It was such a cliched mistake. Cold sweat streamed down his face as the kicking rabbit turned its head like a machine.

The kicking rabbit definitely saw Hajime.

Its ruby red eyes narrow as it caught sight of Hajime. He froze like a frog hypnotized by a snake. Alarm bells started to go off in his head, and his soul told him to run for his life, but his body would not listen.

Finally, the kicking rabbit, which had only been looking back at Hajime, turned its entire body and poured energy into its legs.

(It's coming!)

He knew that by instinct. The kicking rabbit exploded toward him, running at an absurd speed which left afterimages.

When he noticed this, he jumped aside with all his might.

The place he was once standing exploded as if a cannonball struck it, the ground gouged away. Hajime rolled and slid along the floor. He retreated from the epicenter with a pale face.

The kicking rabbit slowly stood up with a slack attitude, only to continue its assault. Hajime quickly constructed a stone wall with Transmute. The stone wall met the rabbit's kick and was easily pierced through.

By pure reflex he brought up his left arm to block. While he was lucky that his face was not crushed as well, the impact had launched him away. Pain coursed through his left arm as he collected himself.

「Guu—」

When he looked down at his left forearm, it was broken, bent at an odd angle. It was completely crushed. While crouching in pain, he desperately looked for the kicking rabbit. What he saw was the creature walking in a relaxed manner, completely different from its earlier attitude. Perhaps it was his imagination, but its eyes had a condescending light in them. It enjoyed toying with him.

Since he was on his back, he could not even retreat well.

Before long, the kicking rabbit stood before Hajime, looking down on him like a worm crawling through the dirt. The kicking rabbit brought its foot upward.

(… So this is the end…)

Despair assaulted Hajime. He adopted a dazed looked and gave up as he stared at the kicking rabbit's feet. Eventually the kick of instant death was swung.

Hajime shut his eyes, horrified at the impending doom. 「…」

But that blow never came.

In fear, Hajime opened his eyes and saw the kicking rabbit's foot in front of his face. The kick was stopped just before it hit him. It could not be, was it still playing with him, trying to instill more fear into him? Hajime thought this, but noticed something off. The kicking rabbit was trembling.

(Wh, what is this? Why is it shaking… it's like it's afraid of something…)

It was not "like," it really was afraid. Hajime tried to run for the right passage using this opening only to catch sight of a new demon.

The beast could only be described as huge. It was 2 meters tall, and its entire frame was covered in white fur. Like all other demons he had met here, it had pulsating crimson lines wrapping its body. If he could compare it to another animal, a bear would come to mind.

The main difference was that its arms extended down to its feet and had three claws nearly 30 centimeters in length.

Before he knew it, the claw bear was nearby, glaring at its prey. Silence enveloped the area. Both Hajime and the kicking rabbit were frozen and did not move. No, they could not move. Just like before, the claw bear's gaze had stopped them.

「… Gururu.」

The claw bear began growling.

「!? 」

The kicking rabbit returned to reality and began retreating at top speed. The strength it used to crush its enemies was used to escape.

However, it was all for naught.

Using a speed unsuitable to its size, the claw bear aimed its sharp claws at the kicking rabbit. The kicking rabbit used its agility to twist its body and dodge the blow.

Hajime was certain the claw bear's attack had missed its target as the kicking rabbit managed to dodge.

However…

When it landed, blood gushed from its body as multiple lacerations appeared. More and more blood poured out until Hajime noticed its body was not even whole anymore. Piece by piece, sections of the kicking rabbit fell off, a fountain of blood erupting.

The gore show disgusted Hajime. The powerful kicking rabbit

demon was taken down so easily without being able to do anything. Now he knew why it was so scared. That claw bear was extraordinary despite itself being stronger than a Capoera expert.

With its huge body lumbering, the claw bear approached the fresh corpse. Sounds of it gorging could be heard.

Hajime could not move. Still consumed by fear, he was eyed by the beast.

Nothing was left of the kicking rabbit after the claw bear took three bites. It turned around and growled at Hajime. The beast's eyes were saying, he was next.

He could only fall to despair. 「Uwaaaa～～～!」

Hajime ran in the opposite direction while screaming madly, forgetting about his broken arm.

If that kicking rabbit could not escape, then the chances were slim for Hajime. The wind howled, he felt pain explode on the left side of the body as he was flung against the wall.

「Gaha!」

The blow had knocked all air out of his lungs. He trailed down the wall and collapsed in a fit of coughing. Hajime was dizzy from the impact but kept his eyes on the claw bear when he noticed the claw bear chewing on something.

What was it chewing on? The kicking rabbit was already gone. Still, the arm it was eating looked familiar. Hajime was confused, but then he noticed he felt lighter on his left body. To be precise, his left arm was…

「E, eh?」

Hajime stiffened. Where's my arm? Why am I bleeding? Hajime could not make sense of what happened. However, the pain assailing him reminded him of the reality of the situation.

「Ah, ah, Agaaaaaaa～～～!!!」

His scream echoed in the passage. Everything below his left elbow had disappeared.

The beast still had its unique magic. Its three claws were able to create blades of wind which could extend up to 30 centimeters. Losing just his arm was actually fortunate. The claw bear was playing with Hajime, so he was lucky, since the kicking rabbit was so quickly disposed of.

After finishing its meal, the claw bear stepped toward Hajime. Its eyes were not looking down on him like the kicking rabbit was. It just saw him as food.

The beast extended its forelimbs toward Hajime. It was going to eat him alive.

「Ah, ah, Guuu, T, "Transmute!"」

With tears and mucous flowing down his face, he transmuted the wall with his remaining arm. It was an unconscious action.

The only power available to Hajime, who had low specs, was this. He used a magic typically used only to process weapons. He was, without a doubt, of the crafting class. Though it was thought of as useless in combat, he, from another world, had showed the knights a new means to apply the skill. It was a skill that saved the lives of his classmates. While on the brink of death, he relied on this skill, and it responded to his desire by giving him a means of escape.

A hole 50 centimeters high, 120 centimeters wide, and 2 meters deep formed. Hajime rolled into the hole, narrowly escaping the certain death grasping for him.

It was overwhelmed with anger from losing its prey.

「Guraaaa!!」

The beast cast its unique magic as it roared, aiming toward the hole Hajime made. The wall was shaved away by its powerful claws.

「Ahhh!! “Transmute!” “Transmute!” “Transmute!”」 Panicking from the incoming monster, Hajime continuously cast

Transmute to delve deeper into the wall. He did not bother looking back. Recklessly, he repeated his magic and advanced with a crawl. All pain and thought were gone. He consumed his magic again and

again as his survival instinct took control.

How far had he progressed?

Hajime did not know, but he could no longer hear the terrible sounds. In reality, he did not move that far. Every use of “Transmute” allowed him to advance 2 meters (about twice as far as he was able to initially). The main problem was his bleeding; he would not be able to move soon.

His awareness dwindled from the excessive bleeding. Still, his body pushed forward.

But…

「“Transmute…” “Transmute…” “Transmute…” “Transmute…”」

No matter how many times he chanted, the wall did not change. His magic had run out before his body. Exhausted, his hand fell from the wall.

Hajime fell on his back as the last strand of his consciousness faded. He aimlessly stared at the heavens, seeing only the darkness.

At that time, Hajime recalled his past. His life flashed before his eyes. His nursery, elementary, middle, and high school days ran by him. Various memories flooded his mind until his final one appeared. The bedroom illuminated by the moonlight. He shared a chat with a goddess and made a promise with her. He recalled her smile.

After remembering her beauty, darkness engulfed him. As his mind slipped away, he felt a drop of water on his cheek.

It was as if someone had shed a tear for him.

Pichon… Pichon…

Hajime felt his consciousness return gradually as water hit his cheek and entered his mouth. Wondering what the liquid was, he slowly opened his mouth.

(… I'm alive? Am I saved…?)

He attempted to get up only to hit his forehead on the low ceiling.

「Agu!?」

He forgot the hole he made was only about 50 centimeters wide, so Hajime tried to extend his arms to make it wider. However, his consciousness was shaken seeing only one arm come into sight.

For a moment, Hajime was stunned, but, before long, he recalled losing his left arm; in that moment, he felt a twinge in his nonexistent left arm. The so called phantom limb pains. With a surge of agony, he looked at the cut off section of flesh.

「… W, why… when there's so much blood?」

He could tell through the darkness how much blood he was lying in

despite there being no light. The amount was beyond salvation, usually.

Hajime searched about with his right hand, feeling something slimy. The blood was not yet dry. Still, it was no dream that he lost such a large amount of blood, but because it was not dry, he had not fainted for a long time.

Hajime thought about how to block off the wound when a drop of water fell onto his cheek into his mouth. The moment it did, Hajime felt energy returning to his body.

「… It can't be… was it this?」

Hajime endured the fatigue of his blood loss and continued transmuting.

Again and again, he advanced deeper in. Mysteriously, when the mysterious liquid oozed into his mouth, his magic recovered, so no matter how much he worked, he did not exhaust his magic power. Hajime continued transmuting without rest.

Before long, the mysterious liquid increased more and more. Eventually, Hajime found the source.

「Th, this is…」

An ore the size of a basketball emitted a light.

It was buried, assimilated with the surrounding rock as it dripped liquid. It was a beautiful, mysterious stone, emitting a blue darker than aquamarine.

For a moment, Hajime forgot his phantom limb pains.

The next moment, he stretched out to the stone and put his mouth to it directly.

The dull pain and haze covering his body and mind cleared away, and his fatigue disappeared. The liquid from this stone had saved him with its restorative powers. Though his phantom limb pains had not settled down, his bleeding and other injuries recovered quickly.

Hajime did not know, but the stone was actually called a 【God Crystal,】 a treasure of the highest grade throughout history, a legendary mineral recognized as a lost item.

The God Crystal was created by magic which flowed through the earth, condensing over 1000 years. After forming a crystal of about 30 to 40 centimeters in diameter, it would require centuries before its magic was saturated to the point where liquid would overflow.

The liquid itself was called 【Holy Water,】 and it was said anyone who drinks it will recover from any injury or illness. Though there was no power to reproduce defective or lost body parts, rumor had it that so long as one drinks it, their lifespan would never decrease; therefore, it was called a miraculous immortal medicine. Legends say God Eht healed people using this Holy Water.

Finally noticing he had returned from the brink of death, Hajime leaned against the wall and fell down. He buried his head in his knees and shivered in fear. He lacked the energy to escape; his

mind was broken.

Hajime had been confronted with hostility and malice. He would have been happy if help arrived, perhaps he could have stood up again.

But the claw bear's gaze frightened him. They were eyes of a predator which only saw Hajime as food. As a human who stood at the top of the food chain, he had never experienced such eyes. Those very eyes deprived him of his arm and broke his mind.

(Someone… Help me…)

Deep in the Abyss, his voice reached no one…

What had he done?

Hajime lay on his side, curled up in a fetal position. It had been 4 days since his collapse.

Hajime had hardly moved, sustained only by the Holy Water. Though it could keep him alive, it could not ease his hunger. He would not die, but he would continue suffering from his phantom limb pains and hunger pangs.

(How did I end up like this?)

That question formed in his mind again and again.

His mind had recovered from drinking the Holy Water, even if he was still suffering from pain and hunger. Still, he could clearly feel the pain. After losing consciousness, he would awake from the pain or sense of starvation; to escape the pain, he would drink the Holy Water again, and this cycle would repeat itself.

How many dozens of times did this repeat itself?

One day, Hajime stopped drinking the Holy Water. Subconsciously, he had decided on the quickest means of ending his pain.

(If this pain continues on… I would rather…) After muttering that, he fell unconscious.

3 days passed.

His sense of starvation seemed to settle after peaking, like the calm before the storm, before assaulting him intensely. The phantom limb pains had not settled, wearing away at Hajime's spirit. It was as if the unbearable pain was cutting him down like a fine knife, little by little.

(Still… not dead? Ahh, hurry up, hurry… but I don't want to die…) While hoping for death, he unconsciously clung to life. The

contradicting thoughts crossed him. It was impossible for Hajime to

think normally. He could only mutter deliriously.

3 more days pass.

The Holy Water was losing its efficacy. He would likely die in 2 more days. He had not had anything else to eat or drink.

However, before these 8 days passed, Hajime's mind grew abnormal. He alternated in his wish for life and death, only waiting for the hellish pain to pass; something dark stagnated and welled up inside.

It was thick like mud, entering the cracks in his mind created by the pain and fear, little by little, little by little, invading deep inside.

(Why do I have to suffer like this… What did I do…?) (Why did this happen… What's the cause…)

(God unreasonably took me…) (My classmate betrayed me…) (The rabbit looked down on me…) (That guy feasted on me…)

Hajime's thoughts gradually grew darker. It was like a black ink drop on a blank sheet of paper. The Hajime who was once far more beautiful was now dirty.

Who was it? Who forced this injustice on him? Who harmed him? He unconsciously searched for an enemy. Pain and sensation gnawed at his spirit, and the darkness only accelerated his change.

(Nobody's come to rescue me…)

(If no one is coming to help, what should I do?) (How do I get rid of this pain?)

Day 9. Hajime's thoughts made a breakthrough.

With a heart wishing for liberation from his intense suffering, his thoughts went round and round unnecessarily, his anger and hatred springing upward.

It was not a mind dyed in abhorrence. It was a mind dyed black; his pain was harsh. To break through this unfair situation, to survive, he decided to get rid of anything extraneous.

(What… do I want?) (I want "Life.") (Who impedes me?) (The enemy.)

(What is an enemy?)

(One who obstructs me, who forces their injustice on me.) (What should I do?)

(I, I…)

Day 10.

Hajime was free of his hatred and anger. The outrageous God, his back-stabbing classmate, the hostile demons…

To live, to survive, nothing else mattered. Hajime's desire was boiled down to one goal. It was honed like a sword. Sharp, strong, able to cut through anything.

That was…

(Kill.)

Not for malice, hostility, nor hatred.

Because it was necessary to live, a pure killing intent, all in order to live.

All who threatened his survival were enemies, and to his enemies, (Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill,

Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill,

At this moment, the mild, gentle Hajime who smiled wryly at any sign of conflict, the Nagumo Hajime Kaori felt was strong, fell from grace.

A new Nagumo Hajime came into existence. One that would ruthlessly eliminate all who stood in his way toward survival.

His broken heart formed once again. However, it was hardly weak. It was reforged from the fires of agony, despair, and darkness.

Hajime began to move his weakened body. For the past few days, he had lapped up any Holy Water like a dog drinking from its bowl. Even if his pain and hunger remained, his body was still revitalized.

His eyes shined as he violently wiped his wet mouth, and his face broke into a fearless grin. His canines seemed warped. His expression changed suddenly, just like his thoughts. Hajime rose to perform Transmute, and he once again muttered…

「Kill.」

In the Labyrinth, there were packs of two-tailed wolves. Each pack typically numbered four to six. Because they were the weakest on this floor, they grouped together. The group Hajime saw was no exception, totaling four in number.

He cautiously observed his surroundings from his hiding spot near the wall and waited for the best hunting ground. The most fundamental method was to set up an ambush.

He let the wolves wander for a while until he discovered the perfect site which had rock coverings near each corner of the room. The moment one split away, he butchered it by crushing it between a rock and the wall. Hajime salivated at the thought of his prey as the other two-tailed wolves felt something was off.

Since cooperation was their greatest tool for survival, they had an inborn link with one another. Pack mates would not be able to directly communicate with each other, but they always knew where the others were, and the others of the pack clearly knew something was wrong.

They had gathered in a group of four, but the leader could only sense three. One of the wolves had disappeared on the opposite side of the wall.

It harbored doubts and stood from its prone position when suddenly it heard its pack mate scream. A sense of restlessness was sent to all of them as yet another of the pack disappeared. The first seemed as if it had been captured, struggling to escape from something it could not get free of.

The second went to check. But at that time, it struggled and disappeared as well.

Confused, it quickly checked the surroundings only to find nothing. The remaining two wolves sniffed around the area.

At that moment, the ground fell and the walls grew out to cover them.

As they were about to jump aside, the depressed floor reverted to its original state. The wolves could have easily escaped if not for the fact that the situation was unexpected and new to them.

The assailant had already planned for their confusion and hesitation, which provided ample opportunity to capture them.

「Guraaaaa!?」

The two wolves screamed as the walls swallowed them… then nothing was left.

Hajime had caught all four wolves. Fighting back with all his determination, he was able to suppress his hunger and phantom limb pains. The Holy Water sustained him this far, and he had managed to increase his magic capacity and ability with his focused transmuting. He was faster, more accurate, and more delicate now. If he had gone out earlier, he may very well have died. Hajime had trained in a transmuted room with the God Crystal, polishing his weapon, Transmute, even a little further.

Even if he could endure the pains, they still assaulted him. The pain and hunger were what gave Hajime such extreme concentration. It allowed him to act several times faster than normal, and he could now transmute up to 3 meters away. Of course, he did not have immediate offensive capabilities that Earth Magic would provide.

He had a small container filled with Holy Water and searched for his enemies.

He had found the pack of four wolves and decided to shadow them. Though he had nearly been discovered many times, he transmuted walls so they could not chase after him. The moment they had separated, he had used that wall to drag them in.

「Now what? Transmute has no direct killing power. My speed and strength won't be sufficient enough to pierce through these, either.」

Hajime looked through a small peep hole with glistening eyes. The motionless wolves were truly "in the wall," completely encased by stone, unable to move in the slightest, growling while filled with anxiety.

Before, he tried to attack demons by using a sharp edge from stone, but he did not have the strength or the speed, and the weapon itself could not endure practical use. Still, his abilities were similar to Earth Magic. But, to the end, Transmute was a magic which processed minerals, it was impossible to impart some killing ability to it. The most he could do was restrain them.

「I could suffocate them… but I can't wait for that.」

Hajime's eyes were those of a predator as he smiled from ear to ear.

Hajime, holding his right hand to the wall, used Transmute. A portion of the rock was cut out as he focused on a distinct image. Little by little, a thin spear, shaped like a spiral, was completed. Furthermore, there was a handle and something like a steering wheel installed on the handle.

「Now then, dig, dig!」

He thrust the spear toward the ground where the wolves stood.

Their hard fur and skin made contact with the tip of the spear.

「I really can't stab you. But I figured that'd be the case.」 He did not make a knife or a sword, the reason being because

demons were known to become harder the stronger they were. Of course, Hajime had studied beforehand to supplement his inability, so he knew many of the weaknesses of each race; he knew a typical knife or sword would be pointless for a demon of this strength.

And so, Hajime began rotating the handle on the spear, causing it to spiral to match his actions. He used the spear as a drill to pierce through the demon's hard skin.

He desperately turned the spear while using his right hand to apply weight to it. Eventually, a small hole appeared in the two-tailed wolf's skin.

「Guraaaa!!」

The wolf screamed.

「Hurt? I won't apologize. This is so I can live. You'd eat me, too, right? We're the same.」

As he said this, he rotated the drill and applied more weight. The two-tailed wolf struggled desperately to escape, but it was impossible with not a single gap to work with.

Finally, the drill broke through its tough skin, mercilessly destroying its innards. Its death throes escaped its mouth, and eventually the creature twitched and stopped moving.

「Right, time for some food.」

He laughed joyously as he butchered the other three in the same manner. When he finished, he removed the carcasses and skinned them, troubled by having only one hand.

His hunger stimulated his desire to consume.

In the darkness, the Green Light Stones illuminated the surroundings.

A few shadows could be seen. One shadow was of a person crouching before a beast, chewing desperately.

「Agaa, guu, this is seriously shitty!」

Hajime cursed as he ate the two-tailed wolf flesh.

It was tough, and it dripped blood as he tore into it and desperately swallowed. This was his first meal in 2 weeks. His stomach, suddenly having meat thrown into it, was surprised, protesting in pain. But Hajime swallowed bite after bite knowing this would happen.

He looked completely feral. It was like a reflection of cruelty and hatred seen by any civilized person.

The cruel smell and taste made his eyes water as his sense of starvation was pleasantly healed. He did not think he could have

been so happy eating a meal like this, he was in a daze as he continued.

After eating so much that his belly seemed like it would swell, he used the Holy Water as a beverage, something the Saint Church would faint seeing, to wash his food down, when something happened to Hajime's body.

「Ah? —!? Agaa!!!」

An intense pain assaulted his body. Erosion. He felt it go through his body, intensifying as time passed.

「Guaa! Wh, what… Guuu!」

Excruciating pain corroded his body. Hajime thrashed about on the ground. It was enough to blow even his phantom pains away.

With trembling hands, Hajime reached into his breast pocket and took out a stone test tube. He chewed the edge of the tube and drank the contents inside. The Holy Water quickly went to work, easing the pain. However, the agony returned.

「Higugaaa!! Why… it didn't help, Agaaa!」

His body pulsated with pain. He could hear the sounds coming from his body, his ears ringing like a tuning fork.

However, the Holy Water began restoring his body once again. When it finished healing him, the pain returned. Then he was restored again.

He could not even faint due to the Holy Water. Its healing effects were backfiring on him.

Hajime screamed as he floundered about on the ground. He hit his head against the wall, trying to end this hell. Even if he wanted to die, no one would grant him such mercy, so he could only endure.

Hajime's body began changing.

His hair lost all color. Perhaps due to the pain, or possibly something else, his black hair common to a Japanese quickly turned white. Next, his muscles and skeleton gradually thickened, crimson lines emerging across his body.

There exists a phenomenon known as super compensation. It is a process the body goes through when training muscles. The muscles are broken down from severe use and, in order to adapt to the strain, recover with more muscle tissue. Bones, too, restore in a similar manner when broken so as to increase their strength. This very process was what Hajime's body was undergoing.

Demon meat was a deadly poison for humans. All demons had magic cores in their body, which allowed for superb physical ability and magical power. Inside Hajime's body, this magic was permeating his bones and muscles.

Though the phenomenon was unclear, demons have their own unique magic which does not require aria or magic formations.

Regardless, this magic power was fatal for humans. It would invade a human's body, destroying the cells from the inside out.

In the past, everyone who ate demon flesh, without exception, died. In truth, Hajime also knew this, but his sense of starvation completely pushed this knowledge to the depths of his mind.

If Hajime had only eaten the demon flesh, he would have collapsed and died; however, he had an elixir which prevented that. It was Holy Water. It restored his body, on the brink of breakdown, immediately. As a result, his body grew stronger at a terrifying speed.

Destruction, restoration, destruction, restoration. His body pulsated as it changed. His external appearance seemed as if it was transforming. This was a ceremony of his weak body being thrown away, his new body reborn. Hajime's screams were his first cries of birth.

Before long, the pulsation stopped, and Hajime went limp in exhaustion. His hair was pure white, and several crimson lines, though not visible beneath his clothes, covered his body. They were like the kicking rabbit, the two-tailed wolves, and the claw bear.

Hajime's right hand twitched. His closed eyes opened slightly. His unfocused gaze settled on his right arm. He eventually scratched at the ground, clasping his fist silently.

Hajime opened and closed his hand many times, as if checking to see if he was alive, then he slowly stood up, confirming that his

hand moved by his own will.

「… Right, I wasn't supposed to eat demon meat… I'm an idiot, but I really couldn't help it.」

Hajime ridiculed himself with an exhausted expression.

His sense of starvation was lost, he did not feel pain after such a along time, even his phantom limb pains seemed to have been blown away. His body was strangely light, as if filled with power.

Despite being mentally exhausted due to the enormous pain he had just experienced, he was in his best condition. Looking at his arm and belly, he clearly developed muscles. He had become taller, as well. Hajime was originally 165 centimeters tall before, and he was 10 centimeters taller now.

「What happened to my body? I feel strange…」

Not only had his external body changed, he felt something out of place within. It felt cold and hot at the same time. When he became more aware, he focused on the crimson lines on his arm.

「Uwaa, nasty. Makes me feel like a demon… what a joke. Ah, right, my Status Plate…」

He fumbled through his pocket as he searched for the Status Plate which he had forgotten. Apparently he had not lost it. Hajime

confirmed his present stats. He also understood something about the abnormality in his body.

＝＝＝

「Could that strange sensation since before be magic?」Hajime thought. After concentrating for a moment, he attempted “Magic Manipulation.”

When he began focusing, crimson lines appeared on the surface of his body again. He imagined focusing the sensation he had throughout his body focusing on his right hand. His actions were slow and awkward, but he could feel the magic begin moving.

「Oh, oh, ohh～?」

He raised his voice feeling the indescribable sensation as it gathered around the magic formation for his magic drawn on his glove, feeling it remain fixed in his right hand. Hajime was surprised how simple it was to transmute. The ground easily rose.

「Seriously? I don’t even need to chant? The principles of magic say direct manipulation is impossible. The exception being demons… I guess I gained some of their characteristics by eating demon meat…」

His thoughts were correct. Hajime had indeed acquired the characteristics of a demon. Hajime then tried the next skill, “Lightning Clad.”

「Hmm… what should I do? If it’s “Lightning Clad,” then it’s electricity, right? Is it that? The thing the two-tailed wolves did…」

He tested many methods, but did not notice a change. This was unavoidable, since Hajime still did not have a grasp of how magic

felt. As he groaned in annoyance, he recalled when he transmuted something,image was important. There were many things not written into a magic formation, so a distinct image was most important in the process.

Hajime imagined static electricity. Then bright crimson electricity appeared at the tips of his fingers on his right hand.

「Ohh～ I can do it… I see, for demons, the image is the most important part.」

Afterward, he repeatedly discharged electricity. However, he was unable to make it launch outward like the two-tailed wolves. Rather than discharging it, he could surround his body, which was likely the reason the skill was called “Lightning Clad.” To adjust the current and voltage, he would need more practice.

Finally, he looked to the “Stomach Strengthening” skill. He hoped it was a skill that would mean he would not be wracked in pain when eating demon flesh again. Even so, there was no food in the Labyrinth. To deal with starvation or pain, it was a difficult decision, but this skill, Hajime expected, would solve the dilemma.

Hajime took a piece of meat from the two-tailed wolves and fried it with lightning. After dealing with his sense of starvation, he did not find a need to eat anything raw again. Despite the strong smell, he endured.

He made up his mind and swallowed the meat.

10 seconds… 1 minute… 10 minutes… and nothing happened. Hajime cooked more meat and ate again. However, he was not assaulted by that pain. Perhaps it was thanks to the Stomach Strengthening skill, or perhaps he had built up a tolerance. Though

he did not know, Hajime was happy. He did not enjoy tasting hell with every meal.

Hajime set to his meal with gusto, then decided to return to his base. It was still impossible to win against the claw bear. Therefore, he decided to work hard on mastering his new powers.

He carved the meat from the other two-tailed wolves. It was far easier than before. Before long, Hajime returned to his base with the God Crystal, carefully putting the meat into stone containers he made.

Several days passed after Hajime returned to the base, which he had spent honing his transmuting and other new skills.

His skills were growing well. There was especially a significant change in Transmute. He had developed a derivative skill, “Mineral Appraisal.” This skill was something only the top tier blacksmiths under the direct control of the capital might have.

Usually a magic formation larger than even an attack magic was necessary, so there were limited facilities with such capabilities to perform this magic. However, for a person with this skill, just by touching a mineral, the stone could be analyzed with a simple aria and magic formation. This was a special derivation skill acquired not by potential but after years of continuous transmuting.

Hajime immediately decided to examine the surrounding minerals. The description which showed up on his Status Plate when he used “Mineral Appraisal” on Green Light Stone was as follows.

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The moment Hajime saw this explanation, a thought appeared in his mind.

Combustion Stones could play the role of gunpowder from Earth. In that case, he could use his transmuting abilities to create a weapon with maximal offensive capabilities.

Hajime was excited. Though it would take trial and error to make it, as well as a large amount of labor, his transmuting ability had saved him on countless occasions, and now he had a form of ammunition.

Forgetting the time, Hajime focused on transmutation, failing thousands of times before he finally succeeded.

With an attack that could surpass the speed of sound for a short distance, it was a modern weapon with great firepower.

The barrel was 35 centimeters long and had a revolving magazine which held six bullets of Taur Ore, the hardest ore in the area.

The barrel was long and rectangular, and the bullets were made of Taur Ore with powdered Combustion Stone compressed within.

He had made an oversized revolver. Furthermore, the bullets were not just explosive due to the Combustion Stone, he was able to accelerate them via electromagnetic acceleration using the unique magic “Lightning Clad.” Its power was already ten times that of a

real rifle. He named it Donner. He desired and felt it necessary to name his partner.

「… If it's this, that monster… I'll be able to deal with him!」 With a slight smile, Hajime looked at the arm based off modern

weaponry displayed before his eyes.

Rather than sword and shield which were the only weapons well made in this world, using the "Transmute" skill of the common "Transmuter" job, a new weapon was born in a world of sword and magic.

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He consumed the entire rabbit in one sitting. With “Stomach Strengthening,” he was able to eat as much as he wanted. Furthermore, Hajime got far more hungry after using magic. In order to kill the kicking rabbit, he had used a lot of power.

He would not die since he had the Holy Water, but he had to use his power carefully; the sensation of starvation that happened when he overused his power was not something he wanted.

As an aside, he had trapped the kicking rabbit. He brought the kicking rabbit to a small river, and the moment it arrived, he shocked it with the maximum voltage of “Lightning Clad.”

Though it smoked from its entire body, as expected, he rushed the attack and had to fire at it from head on with Donner.

A bullet accelerated with electromagnetism to a speed approximately 3.2 kilometers per second, the attack blew the creature’s head to dust. Donner’s strength was terrifying, and it was likely unnecessary for him to shock the creature.

「It’s my first time eating rabbit meat… My status is…」

＝＝＝

AGI:	400
MAG:	350
MDEF:	350
Skill:	**Transmute** [+Mineral Appraisal] [+Precision

Transmute] [+Mineral Investigation] **Magic Manipulation** **Stomach Strengthening** **Lightning Clad** **Divine Step** [+Air Walk] [+Ground Contraction] **Language Comprehension**

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able to move like the rabbit. The skill would combine beautifully with his firearm.

The next skill was [＋Air Walk]. It was not a skill he could easily activate. It was not enough for him to know the name of the skill to perform it. While tried many things out, he recalled the rabbit had made a foothold from the air and jumped off it. With that thought in mind, Hajime imagined a transparent shield in the air. He jumped up to test it.

He dove straight into the ground. 「Guu!?」

His hand went to his face as he thrashed about on the ground, writhing in pain. He took a sip of the Holy Water to reduce the pain.

「… Well, at least I managed to do it…」

The reason he dove into the ground was because his lower body tripped over the very foothold he had created. Still, the reason he stumbled was important. [＋Air Walk] was a unique magic that would allow him to make transparent platforms in midair. He was lucky to get two unique magics in a single sitting, both derived from “Divine Step.”

Learning the sensation of his new skills, Hajime began training. His goal was the claw bear. Hajime would likely be able to defeat the claw bear by shooting it from a long distance, but he trained in case. There was also the possibility that an even stronger demon would appear. Optimism would mean death in this Great Labyrinth. Once he defeated the claw bear, he would search for a way out.

Hajime motivated himself.

In the passage in the Great Labyrinth, a shadow was moving so quickly that only a blurry figure was visible.

It was Hajime. He had mastered the use of all of “Divine Step.” He quickly flitted about the passage; using “Air Walk,” he created platforms to walk on and repeated this at high speeds as he searched for his nemesis.

Normally, a person would prioritize escaping this area, but Hajime wanted to kill the claw bear no matter what. His heart had broken once, and he wanted to fight the monster who caused it.

「Grua!」

He encountered a pack of wolves; one leaped at him. He used a wire attached to Donner which was fixed to his right thigh and somersaulted in the air.

Dopan!

A bullet propelled by Combustion Stone and an electromagnetic field created with “Lightning Clad” stuck true to its aim, crushing the wolf’s head instantly.

Using “Air Walk,” he jumped further into the air, continuously discharging his firearm toward the jumping wolves. While he did

not hit his target every time, his enemies had all perished before he used all the bullets in his chamber.

Hajime placed Donner in his left armpit and quickly reloaded it. He continued on his hunt without glancing back at the corpses.

After killing two-tailed wolves and kicking rabbits for a time, he finally found his target.

The claw bear was currently enjoying a meal. It was feeding on one of the kicking rabbits. After confirming the beast was his arch-enemy, Hajime smiled fearlessly and advanced toward it.

The claw bear was the strongest demon on this level, the master. There were many two-tailed wolves and kicking rabbits in this place, but only one claw bear existed. It was invincible here. All the demons took caution to avoid it. Encountering it would require retreat; there were never thoughts of resistance.

However, this very resistance is what it now faced.

「Yo, claw bear. It's been a while. Was my arm delicious?」

The beast narrowed its sharp eyes. What kind of creature stood before it? Why did it not show its back? Why was there no fear or despair in its eyes? The claw bear could only question itself in its confusion.

「This is revenge. I'll show you I'm your enemy, not your prey.」 Hajime pulled out Donner and pointed the muzzle at the claw

bear. While in this pose, he question himself. Was he afraid? No, there was no despair there, nor did his body quake in fear. There was only the earnest desire to survive and surpass his adversary.

Hajime's lips were formed into a fearless smile. 「I'll be killing and devouring you.」

With this declaration, he fired Donner. An explosive noise echoed as the Taur Ore bullet sped at the claw bear at over 3.2 kilometers per second.

「Guu!?」

The claw bear instantly threw its body to the ground to avoid the shot.

It avoided the bullet it could not even see; its evasion occurred before the bullet had even fired. It had felt Hajime's blood lust. As expected of the master here. For a beast over 2 meters tall, it had a frightening reaction speed.

Still, it was not able to avoid injury, since a part of its shoulder was gouged out, leaking blood onto its white fur.

Anger dwelt in the claw bear's eyes. It had acknowledged Hajime as an enemy.

「Gaaa!!」

It roared and rushed forward with tremendous speed. Seeing the 2 meter tall best with its stout arms spread out was an imposing image.

「Ha ha! That's it! I'm your enemy! I'm not just something for you to hunt!」

While basking in the frightening pressure, Hajime did not loosen his smile.

This was a turning point. Thoughts of his left arm and fragmented emotions ran through his brain. The reason he abandoned everything was before him, and he would take it down. This was a ritual necessary to move forward. If he did not, his heart would remain weak; this was his firm belief.

The claw bear was rushing toward him. He fired Donner, aiming the supersonic bullet between the demon's eyebrows, yet the charging claw bear managed to avoid it. For such a massive figure, it had a ridiculous reaction speed.

When the claw bear entered its strike range, it brandished its claws. It activated its unique magic, causing its three claws to distort.

Hajime recalled the kicking rabbit which dodged, only to be bisected; rather than dodging at the last moment, he chose to

step back as quickly as he could.

「!」

The claw bear's claws passed by where Hajime once was. The claws

did not touch the ground, yet three grooves were engraved there.

The claw bear roared in irritation that it could not kill its prey and chased after him in pursuit.

「Tch, fast!」

Blades of wind passed by Hajime, to which he cursed on reflex. He escaped to the air using “Air Walk” as he fired a third time, the claw bear evading the bright crimson light passing by its body as if ignoring inertia. Down on the ground were deep claw marks, likely caused by blades of wind generated from the creature’s claws, it was far swifter than the typical beast.

「Guraaaa!!」

The moment the claw bear roared, it swung its arms at Hajime, both of them intersecting. The next moment, a loud sound echoed around Hajime. Without time to think, Hajime immediately activated “Air Walk” and “Ground Contraction” at the same time to jump back from where he stood.

Hajime heard an explosion at the wall behind him as he felt the wind pass over his thigh.

「Gu, you shit. I was about to win.」

Hajime fell to the ground while groaning. He had not landed properly and fell to the ground, struggling to stand up as he felt a pain in his thigh. The claw bear’s blades of wind had caught him.

With a twisted expression, Hajime pulled Donner’s trigger without

hesitation. Immediately after he fell, the claw bear had already approached him. Twice the sound of explosions were heard as he aimed his bullets for the head and body. Even the claw bear could not avoid it, receiving an impact to the side of its head; it had avoided a fatal wound by dodging, but the wound stopped its next claw attack.

But this did not change the fact that the massive creature was charging at him like a cannonball, and Hajime could not move well due to the injury to his foot; unable to avoid the rush of the claw bear, he was blown away.

「Gaha!?」

While forced to release the air in his lungs, Hajime's face was distorted.

He only had six bullets in Donner, he only had one remaining. He did not believe the claw bear would give him the time to reload. If he lost the offensive abilities of Donner, he would not stand a chance against the claw bear. The five explosions were the count down to his death. Still, Hajime grinned. In his mind, he was drawing a path to victory for himself, defeat for the claw bear.

Hajime tossed Donner into the air. At the same time, he took something out of his bosom, as he looked at the claw bear, dripping with blood.

「I'm proud of this. Make sure you pay attention.」

The claw bear turned its gaze as it heard something tapping at its feet, rolling along the ground. There was a spherical object, forest green in color, about 5 centimeters in diameter. While the claw bear looked at it, it exploded with a bright light.

It was a “Flash Grenade” Hajime made.

Hajime had made a flash grenade. It was a simple concept. He filled a Green Light Stone to the brim with magic and coated its surface so the light would not escape. He compressed some powdered Combustion Stone into the center as well as on the surface to act as a fuse.

Hajime used “Lighting Clad” to set off the fuse, igniting the grenade. The fuse had been set for 3 seconds. Hajime spent a large time on trial and error, but the grenade itself was a gem of pride for him.

The claw bear had never encountered such a weapon and was blinded for a moment. It thrashed about chaotically, unable to see anything.

Hajime did not let this chance go. He caught and fired Donner, the electromagnetically accelerated bullet hitting the claw bear’s shoulder, blowing it away from its base.

「Gruaaa!!」

The claw bear screamed in terror, suffering from an unknown sensation in its pain-free life. Copious amounts of blood flowed from the wound. Its left arm was blown off and fell to the ground.

「Well that’s a coincidence.」

Hajime was still not an expert marksman, and he was not purposely

aiming at the left arm. He had still not mastered his gun. He had fought with the two-tailed wolves and kicking rabbits many times, and he still had difficulty firing through moving objects from a distance. That was why taking the claw bear's left arm, just like it had done to him, was sheer luck.

Hajime reloaded quickly and fired again at the rampaging claw bear who had still to recover from its pain.

The claw bear reacted to his killing intent with its intuition despite its confusion and jumped to the side. Hajime passed by the claw bear with "Ground Contraction" to where its left arm had dropped. He lifted the left arm as if showing it off to the claw bear which stared at him in anger as it had recovered slightly.

Slowly, he tore away the demon flesh from the claw bear's arm, chewing it thoroughly. He was reproducing the nightmare the claw bear had once shown him.

「Agu, mugu, as always, this really sucks… I guess it's a bit better than the others, though?」

While he said this, Hajime crouched down daringly, vigilant of the claw bear nearby. The claw bear did not move; there was no fear in its eyes. Still, it could not move carelessly with its eyesight only recovering.

Hajime continued to eat. Eventually, the intense pain he felt from

eating demon flesh the first time returned.

「!?」

Quickly, Hajime pulled out the Holy Water. Though the pains were not as fierce this time, he was still unable to fully withstand it; he fell to his knee, and his face was distorted in pain. Because the claw bear was so much more powerful than the two-tailed wolves and kicking rabbits, its flesh had affected him.

The claw bear did not care about Hajime's situation at all, though. When it saw its chance, it charged forward again. Hajime did not move at all; he would soon be trampled by the claw bear. When their first meeting was about to be reproduced, Hajime's lips split into a grin.

He placed Donner back in its holster and placed his right hand on the ground. He cloaked his arm in lightning. His most powerful "Lightning Clad" traveled through the liquid on the ground, ruthlessly assaulting the claw bear.

Naturally, that liquid was the claw bear's blood. Hajime picked up the claw bear's bleeding left arm and scattered its blood to the air, forging a path between the various blood pools.

Eating in battle and showing off was not something he normally did. Though he did not factor in the possibility of feeling pain from consuming flesh, Hajime had intended to lay a trap for the beast. He wanted to eat the arm to anger the claw bear enough so it would rush straight at him. Though the plan went awry, the results were fine.

The moment the claw bear stepped into the sea of its own blood, the strong electric current violated its body. Every nerve was shocked, every muscle grilled. Even at full power, Hajime's unique magic fell short of the original. He could not launch his lightning,

and his output was only half that of the two-tailed wolves'. At this moment, it would only work to paralyze the beast. Still, it was strong enough to vaporize a human.

「Ruguuu」

The claw bear fell down in its own blood, its eyes still glaring at Hajime.

Hajime looked back. Slowly, he stood up while enduring his pain. He unholstered Donner and placed its muzzle on the claw bear's forehead.

「I'll be eating you now.」

With those words, he pulled the trigger. The bullet faithfully executed its master's will, destroying the claw bear's head.

The gunshot echoed through the Labyrinth.

Not for a moment did the claw bear take its eyes off Hajime, nor did he take his eyes of it, not even to the end.

There was no sensation of exhilaration, but he did not feel empty, either. He did what he needed to do. It was all in order to live, to earn the right to survive.

Hajime closed his eyes and faced his own heart. He was determined to live this way. He did not like fighting. He did not want to feel pain. He did not wish to starve again.

All he desired… was to live.

He would crush the unreasonable, show no mercy to his enemies, all to survive.

He would live this way… and then… return home.

「Right… I want to go back… Nothing else matters. I'll find my own way home. I'll grant my own wish. Anyone who gets in my way, no matter what, I will…」

Hajime opened his eyes and grinned fearlessly. 「Kill.」

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[+ Mineral
Appraisal]
[+ Precision

Transmute] [+ Mineral Investigation] [+ Mineral Extraction] [+ Mineral Fusion] **Magic Manipulation** **Stomach Strengthening** **Lightning Clad** **Divine Step** [+ Air Walk] [+ Ground Contraction] **Wind Claw** **Language**

Comprehension

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worse happened, the Hero Party needed to be taken care of.

Shizuku remembered when they first returned to the Kingdom. She wanted to wake Kaori in the morning, so she had gone to sleep early.

By that morning, news of Hajime's death was reported. Though everyone was astonished, they all heaved a sigh of relief that it was the "Incompetent" Hajime that had passed.

Even the King and Ishtar had the same reaction. None of the stronger members had died. If they could not return alive from just exploring the Great Labyrinth, it would not be possible to fight the Devils. The heroes chosen by God must be unrivaled.

But the King and Ishtar were sensible. They were discrete in slandering Hajime.

Of course, no one made remarks in public before, but it could be felt from the nobles whispering amongst themselves. They thought it best that the useless person died. An Apostle of God who was useless would naturally perish. Now, they were speaking ill as they pleased. Shizuku wanted to go on a rampage and cut them down many times.

Kouki, with his strong sense of justice, was hardly amused, but he remained silent. Perhaps he thought it would leave a bad impression if he protested against the King and the Saint Church. Perhaps judging this differently, some people who had abused Hajime thought he was simply disposed of…

Oppositely, rumors spread that Kouki was a gentle person, anxious about his once incapable follower. Kouki's stock went up in the Kingdom, unhindered by the event from before.

It was undeniable who saved them at that time. Hajime had kept the Behemoth in check to allow them time to escape. To think he would die because of a stray shot from one of their classmates… is what he said.

She did not speak to her classmates about her thoughts on the friendly fire. Though they all had a grasp of their magic, there were countless spells cast like a storm at that time,and the thought that "maybe it was my magic," made it impossible to breach the topic. Because this would simply mean she herself was the murderer.

To escape reality, she wondered what Hajime did to cause such hatred. Dead men tell no tales. Rather than looking for the culprit recklessly, it would be best to leave the situation alone for now. The class was currently unified.

To clarify the details at the time, Commander Meld felt it necessary to interview the students. Just like the students, he, too, chose to escape from reality, even if the situation was difficult to regard as a mistake. Even if the matter was as clear as black and white, he questioned them for the benefit of the students.

To leave this unsettled would only invite trouble later on. Above all, Commander Meld wanted answers. He failed in his promise to "help" Hajime, and his heart ached at that.

Commander Meld's actions were all for naught. Ishtar banned any interrogation of the students. Commander Meld persisted in his actions, but eventually even the King forbid it.

「If you find out more… will you be angry?」

Taking Kaori's hand, who had yet to wake up since that day, Shizuku muttered to herself.

According to the doctor, there were no abnormalities in her body, rather, she was in this state because it was a defensive mechanism for the mental shock she received; she would wake up naturally with time.

Shizuku clasped Kaori's hand, 「Please, let nothing more harm my kind friend,」 she prayed to no one.

Suddenly, Kaori's hand twitched.

「!? Kaori! Can you hear me!? Kaori!」

Shizuku desperately called out to her. Kaori's closed eyes shivered. Shizuku continued calling to her friend, receiving a grip in response.

Slowly, Kaori awoke. 「Kaori!」

Leaning on the bed, Kaori saw Shizuku overlook her with tears in her eyes. Kaori blankly looked at her surroundings, her gaze not yet focused. Shizuku watched over her, calling her name as Kaori's

head began functioning again.

「… Shizuku-chan?」

「Yeah, it's me, Kaori. How is your body? Any discomfort?」「I'm fine. Just tired because I was sleeping…」

「Well, it's been 5 days now…」

Shizuku forced a smile and tried to help Kaori get up. Kaori reacted to that.

「5 days? Why… We… we went to the Labyrinth… and then…」 Her eyes gradually came into focus. Shizuku tried to change the topic, having a bad premonition. However, Kaori recalled her

memories too quickly. 「Then… Nagumo-kun…」「… That's…」

Shizuku's face had a painful expression as she thought about how to tell Kaori. Kaori realized the tragedy in her memories had come true; however, it was not easy for her to accept such a reality.

「You're lying, right…? Shizuku-chan, when I fainted, you managed to save Nagumo-kun, right? Right? You did, didn't you? This is the castle, everyone came back, right? Nagumo-kun must be training. Yeah, I'll go there now. I have to thank him. Say something, Shizuku-chan…」

Kaori wanted to escape from the harsh reality, forming her words

again and again; when she mentioned that she would search for Hajime, Shizuku grasped her arm and would not let go.

She was sorrowful, but still, she stared at Kaori.

「… Kaori, you understand, don't you? He's not here…」
「Stop…」

「Kaori, remember.」「Please, stop…」

「He, Nagumo-kun…」

「No, stop… Please, stop!」「Kaori! He's dead!」

「You're wrong! He can't die! He can't have! How can you say such a horrible thing? I won't forgive even you, Shizuku-chan!」

Kaori shook and tried to escape Shizuku's grasp. Even so, Shizuku did not let go and embraced her. She tried to calm Kaori down.

「Let go! Let me go! If I don't look for him! Please… he's definitely alive… Let me go…」

Kaori's face dropped into Shizuku's chest as she sobbed and shouted.

Clinging to Shizuku, Kaori screamed louder. Shizuku simply held her, hoping to ease her pain.

The sun had begun to set by the time they separated. Kaori remained motionless in Shizuku's arms as she sobbed.

「Kaori…」

「… Shizuku-chan… Nagumo- kun… He fell… he isn't here …」 Kaori whispered in a voice so soft it seemed like it would

disappear. Shizuku did not want to sugar coat her words, since they would only be a temporary comfort and could even make things worse. She did not want to see her friend in such pain.

「That's right.」

「Whose magic hit Nagumo-kun? Who?」

「I don't know. No one wants to mention it. It's scary. What if it was me…」

「I see.」

「Do you have a grudge?」

「… I don't know. If someone knew… I would surely blame that person… but no one knows… I think this is for the best. I don't think I would be able to stand it otherwise…」

「I see…」

Kaori was downcast as she spoke. She wiped her face and eyes and faced Shizuku, making a resolute declaration.

「Shizuku-chan, I, I don't believe it. Nagumo-kun is alive. I don't believe he's dead.

「Kaori, that's…」

Shizuku looked sad as she tried to persuade Kaori. Kaori clasped Shizuku's cheeks with her hands and smiled.

「I know. I know it's weird to think he could survive that… But we haven't checked yet. Even if it's slim, since we haven't checked, he could still be alive. I'm going to believe in that chance.」

「Kaori…」

「I'll become stronger. Strong enough to prevent this from happening again. I'll make sure with my own eyes. Nagumo-kun's fate… Shizuku-chan.」

「What?」

「Please, help me.」「…」

They stared at one another. Kaori showed no signs of insanity. She simply had not given up. She would clearly not be moved. Kaori was known for being stubborn once she got started on something.

Normally, what Kaori said was not something taken seriously. To believe that someone could fall into the Abyss and survive was crazy.

Perhaps most people, Kouki and Ryuutarou, her childhood friends, included, would simply think Kaori to be optimistic.

For that reason…

「Of course, I'll help. Until you're satisfied, I'll tag along.」
「Shizuku-chan!」

Kaori hugged and thanked her. Shizuku simply said, 「There's no need to thank me, we're friends, right?」 Her nickname of Samurai Girl was not for show.

At that time, the door opened. 「Shizuku! Is Kaori awake…」 「Oh, how are you, Kaori?」

It was Kouki and Ryuutarou. They had come to see Kaori. They were still in their training clothes, somewhat dirty.

Since that day, the two had constantly trained. They did not want anyone else to die like Hajime. And one day, they would get their revenge, a means of thanks for Hajime who had saved them from their crisis. They would not allow themselves to show such weakness again.

The two who entered stiffened. Shizuku looked at them doubtfully.

「You two, why…」 「S, sorry!」

「W, we'll get out of your way!」

They quickly left the room without letting her finish her question. She finally became aware of what the two saw. Kaori stared at them

blankly, so Shizuku noticed the cause of their escape.

Kaori was sitting on Shizuku's knees with both her hands on Shizuku's cheeks. It was like they were about to kiss. Shizuku was supporting Kaori, but it looked like the two were embracing one another.

It was obviously a well laid out lesbian scene. If it were in a manga, flowers would be perfect for a background.

Shizuku sighed deeply. She could not handle the situation and yelled out.

「Hurry up and get back here! You idiots!」

Chapter 3

「Damn, there's nothing…」

3 days after killing the claw bear, Hajime had focused on searching for a path to the higher floors.

He had already searched through 80% of the current floor. After eating the claw bear, his specs had risen. There were no longer any threats here, only unexplored areas. Still, he could find nothing.

No, perhaps that was misleading. Hajime had found a stairwell 2 days ago, but it led downward. With a floor going down, there should also be one heading up to the surface, but it seemed he could not find it here.

If the Labyrinth did not have a path upward, then it was worth trying to make one using his transmutation.

The result was that his transmutation did not work well. While he could freely use the skill on the floors, there was some form of protection at the very top and bottom of the floors. 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】had been made in ancient times and was full of mysteries. Encountering something new was not unexpected.

For that reason, he searched for a path upward; however, he needed to make a decision if he could not find it. The decision to venture further down or not.

「… A dead end. I've looked through all the paths. What could have happened?」

Hajime decided to stop looking for a path up and sighed. He advanced toward the stairwell heading further into the Labyrinth.

The stairs were sloppily made.

It would be more correct to call it an uneven slope rather than a set of stairs. He looked down, only to notice an eerie atmosphere. There was complete darkness with no sign of Green Light Stone being present. It was like the mouth of a huge monster. Hajime felt he would be unable to return once he went down.

「Ha! Bring it on! I'll kill and devour anything that gets in my way.」

While thinking this, Hajime laughed through his nose and smiled. He stepped into the darkness without hesitation.

The floor he arrived at was dark.

Though it was expected, there had always been Green Light Stones present, so he had never been devoid of all vision, even if it was dim.

However, on this floor, there was no light source. He rested to allow his eyes to get accustomed to the darkness. He expected to see more, but there was no difference.

He took out his Green Light Stone lamp from a satchel he created from the claw bear's fur.

It was suicidal to have light in this darkness. It would easily attract demons; however, he was clear on the fact that he would not be able to move without the light. Hajime did not want to occupy his only hand to hold this lamp, so he fastened it to his left elbow.

He had a feeling something was shining in the depths of the passage as he walked for a time, causing him to become more cautious.

He took precaution as he advanced, hiding as much as he could as he felt an unpleasant sign to his left, he pointed the Green Light Stone lamp in that direction and jumped back as he saw a gray lizard, approximately 2 meters long, sticking to the wall, staring at Hajime with its golden eyes.

Its eyes were charged with light. In that moment,

「!?」

Hajime's left arm gave off a strange sound; it was being petrified. The lamp fastened to his arm also petrified, shattering into pieces. Surrounded in darkness, he was already immobile to his shoulder.

Hajime clicked his tongue as he took out some Holy Water from his chest holster, again, made from demon fur. As expected, the petrification halted and his left arm returned to normal.

「You did it!」He cursed inwardly and took out a "Flash Grenade"

from his waist pouch, throwing it toward the golden eyed lizard. At the same time, the golden eyes shined in the darkness. Hajime quickly escaped using “Ground Contraction” and avoided the gaze.

The rock behind where Hajime once stood changed color and crumbled as if weathered by the years. Hajime likened the golden eyes to Evil Eyes of Petrification; the lizard was like a basilisk often seen in RPGs.

Hajime thought these things as he pulled Donner out, covering his eyes with it as a shield.

He was bathed in an intense light as his Flash Grenade went off.
「Kua?!」

For a creature which matured in the darkness, it had never experienced so much light and stood confused, causing the confused basilisk to emerge from the darkness.

Hajime fired at it without a thought. He aimed well and the bullet found the basilisk’s skull. Its brain matter splattered against the wall which was scorched as the bullet hit it. The electromagnetic field he created fired the bullet at such a high speed that it generated intense heat. Currently, only the Taur Ore could handle this.

Hajime approached the basilisk while remaining vigilant to his surroundings. He cleaved meat from its corpse and left the area quickly. He did not feel safe eating in an area with such little visibility. Hajime pushed forward and continued his search.

He searched for many hours but could not find the stairs. In the meantime, he had killed many demons and collected many ores.

Since it was so inconvenient to carry everything, he created his own base.

Hajime placed his hand against the wall and used Transmute. He could easily create a passage in the wall without a problem, eventually creating a separate space. Hajime continued transmuting until he made a space about 6 tatami large. He pulled out the basketball sized ore from his rucksac and placed it in a hollow in the wall. It was the God Crystal. Beneath it was a container to receive any water dripping from it.

Hajime had begun to call the crystal “Potion Stone” and the Holy Water “Potion.” It truly was like a game, though the effects were much stronger.

「Now then, time for a meal.」

Hajime retrieved the meat out of his backpack. He used “Lightning Clad” to cook them. On today’s menu was whole roast basilisk, a whole roast owl whose feathers could be fired out like a shotgun, and whole roast six-legged cat. Of course, there were no seasonings.

「Thanks for the meal.」

After eating for a moment, pain welled within his body. His body was being strengthened. These creatures were even stronger than the claw bear. While their unique magics which were a good combination of this darkness posed a nuisance, Hajime did not have much of a problem since Donner could blow them all away.

He drank the Holy Water and continued eating while ignoring his pain. His phantom limb pains had returned, and they only grew

stronger.

「Mugu, Fuu.～ Thanks for the meal. Now then, My status is…」 He took out his Status Plate. His current stats were…

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His stats had risen as expected. He also acquired three new skills. At that time, he noticed he could see the surroundings more clearly.

This was something he attributed to “Night Vision.” The dungeon was gloomy in general, and, on this level, the skill was a major advantage. The rest were all Passive Skills. Regrettably, he only received “Tolerance” from the Basilisk and not the actual “Petrification” skill. He was disappointed that he missed out on the Evil Eyes of Petrification.

Hajime began to use Transmute to replenish his consumables. To make a single bullet, he needed intense concentration and

precision. The projectile needed to fit in Donner’s firing ring. He could not make a mistake when compressing the propellant. It took him 30 minutes to make a single bullet. Even with that, he thought he did well. He admired how well a person could concentrate when in a life or death situation. While requiring a lot of time, they provided a frightening level of destruction.

Even so, he did not lose motivation since his skill rose remarkably.

It was thanks to his bullet creation that he was able to remove impurities and separate minerals so easily, even fusing minerals had become easier. The only person comparable to Hajime with the Transmute skill was the head craftsman in the Kingdom.

Hajime continued working in silence. He had not advanced further down yet. He had no idea where the Abyss would lead him to, after all. When he finished, he planned to continue with his search. His

mission was to return home as quickly as possible, it was his goal. In the darkness of the Abyss, his resolute face could be seen from the pale light of the God Crystal.

Except for when he needed to replenish his supplies, Hajime continued his exploration. He did not know when or where he could rest through this Great Labyrinth. The darkness no longer mattered due to “Night Vision,” and he was able to use his “Physical Perception” Skill to sense anything within a 10 meter radius. With these skills, he was able to speed up his search.

Finally, he found the stairs. He took them down without any hesitation.

On the next floor, the ground seemed like a quagmire. It was difficult to move his stuck feet. Frowning, he created platforms to walk on with “Air Walk” and continued his search.

Hajime checked the surrounding minerals with “Mineral Investigation” and found something interesting.

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Hajime continued his exploration after sealing his “Rail Gun” and

“Lightning Clad.”

He eventually caught sight of a three-way intersection. He took the left passage to check the nearby walls.

At that moment,

Kachin!

「!?」

A shark-like demon jumped from the tar, displaying its huge mouth lined with sharp teeth. It closed its gaping jaw as it aimed at Hajime’s head. Hajime quickly bent over to dodge the attack, but he still shuddered.

(“Physical Perception” didn’t pick it up at all!)

Ever since he obtained the skill, Hajime had been using it constantly. It should have picked up any monster within a 10 meter radius of him; however, the shark remained hidden the entire time.

The shark, having missed Hajime, returned to the tar silently, all signs disappearing.

(Shit! I really can’t sense it!)

Hajime ground his teeth at this incomprehensible state of affairs. He quickly stopped to use “Air Walk.”

As if aiming for that moment, the shark jumped out again. 「Don't underestimate me!」

Hajime fired at the shark which was in midair as he jumped and somersaulted. The bullet tore through the air as it headed toward the shark's back.

However,

「Shit! So this is how it's going to be!」

The bullet was like rubber to the shark and only dented its scales.

The scales themselves were able to mitigate physical impact.
「Guu!」

Using its momentum, it jumped into the tar. The shark flipped over and aimed where Hajime was going to land.

By twisting his body, Hajime managed to avoid the attack, though it still tore at part of his flank. Hajime fell into the tar from the shock and quickly stood back up, jumping into the air. His entire body was covered in the black tar. The shark emerged from below and gnashed its jaws together.

Hajime felt a cold sweat as he jumped through the air. Even if he was cornered, he was still smiling.

「Bring it!」

He never stopped moving as he used “Air Walk,” always searching for a chance to attack.

His concentration, forged by training his transmutation, had increased, and he was able to remove all unnecessary thoughts.

(… It wouldn’t be a problem if I could sense it. This is a skill I didn’t have originally. Even if I can’t sense it now, my chance is when it attacks.)

Hajime continued jumping about, but his balance was abruptly broken. The shark, not overlooking this chance, pounced from Hajime’s blind spot.

「It helps that you’re simple.」

Hajime immediately regained his balance. With the shark in the air to attack, Hajime pulled out Donner.

Blood splashed to the floor as the shark’s flank was torn off. The shark struggled as it hit the tar.

Hajime had purposely shown a weakness to lure the shark in, making it easier to place his shot. What tore through the shark was the unique magic “Wind Claw” which he activated using Donner as the source.

Hajime aimed Donner at the struggling shark’s head. With “Wind

Claw," he cut its head in two. He was unable to form three blades like the claw bear, but the sharpness far surpassed a well made sword. It was reliable, as expected of a unique magic.

「Let's find out why I can't sense this.」 Hajime licked his lips as he said this.

After cutting the meat off the shark, he continued his exploration until he found the stairs.

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Another floor appeared to be a dense jungle despite it being an underground dungeon. It was terrifyingly dense and sultry, making it extremely unpleasant to be in. The demons of this floor were large centipedes and trees.

As he traversed the jungle, the huge centipedes fell from atop the trees, giving even Hajime goosebumps. It was too disgusting.

Furthermore, the centipedes would split into different sections to attack. It was like seeing thirty black demons in the kitchen appearing all at once.

Hajime tried to repel their numbers with numerous shots from Donner. Still, it took time to reload, so he began tearing them apart with “Wind Claw.” He fought desperately, using kicks he was unaccustomed to. Because of this, Hajime decided to find some way to quickly reload and practice his kicking technique. His entire body was covered in the purple body fluids of the split centipede.

As for the tree demons, they were like Treants from an RPG. Their underground roots would thrust out from the ground and its vines acted as whips.

However, the largest problem when dealing with the treants was not these trivial attacks. When they were in trouble, they would hurl red fruits on their heads. Though it lacked any offensive ability, it was a decoy used to escape. At one time, Hajime thought to experiment and ate one, becoming stiff for a few dozen minutes. Still, it was not poisonous and was rather delicious. It was sweet and red like a watermelon. It was not like an apple at all.

The unpleasantness he felt from this floor was blown away in an instant. Even thoughts of getting out of the Labyrinth disappeared temporarily. It was a food other than fresh meat after many days. Hajime's eyes had completely become those of a hunter, and he used all his strength to hunt the treants. By the time he was satisfied and about to continue with the Labyrinth, he had almost completely annihilated the treants.

With that said and done, he continued advancing until he had gone through 50 floors. Still, there was no sign of the end. As an aside, Hajime's stats at this time were as follows.

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Reproduction]
Magic Manipulation
Stomach Strengthening
Lightning Clad
Divine Step
[+Air Walk]
[+Ground Contraction]
[+Grand Kick]
Wind Claw
Night Vision **Far Sight**
Physical Perception
Magic Perception
Presence Interception
Poison Tolerance
Paralysis Tolerance
Petrification Tolerance

Language Comprehension

Hajime sat in a base he made on the 50th floor, training his transmutation ability, kicking techniques, and improving his firearms. He had already discovered the stairwell down, but there was a separate place here.

It was an indescribably eerie space.

There was a solemn, majestic set of double doors, 3 meters in height. On each side of the door was a sculpture of a one- eyed giant enshrined in the walls; only their upper bodies were sculpted.

Chills ran down his entire body the moment he set foot there. For a moment, he had a dangerous feeling. He began preparing his equipment, not intent on avoiding it. This was a “change” at last, so he could do nothing but examine it.

Hajime felt both expectation and repulsion at the same time. If he opened the door, he was sure a disaster awaited him. However, it was a new sensation in this Great Labyrinth.

「It’s like it’s Pandora’s Box… Well, hope might not exist in it, thought.」

He currently possessed weaponry, martial arts, and a variety of skills. One by one, he confirmed they were all in perfect condition. When he finished his task, Hajime unholstered Donner.

He gently closed his eyes. He had built his resolve already. Still, it was not bad to reinforce it. Hajime looked to himself and made an oath.

「I will survive and return home. To Japan, to my house… I’ll go there. Those who obstruct me are enemies. And to all enemies…

Kill!」

Hajime opened his eyes and a daring smile graced his face. Vigilantly, Hajime approached the doors and advanced, arriving

there without incident. As he approached closer, he could see many more beautiful decorations adorning the doors. At the center, two magic formations were drawn in recesses.

「I can't understand this at all. I've read a lot, but I've never seen these formulas.」

When he was called incompetent, Hajime had placed emphasis on obtaining knowledge to make up for his low physical abilities. Of course, he did not finish studying everything, so it was not odd that he could not read the magic formation at all.

「Is it an older system?」

While taking a guess, Hajime examined the door, though he was unable to learn anything new. Because it was important to do so, he stayed alert for any possible traps. Regardless, with his current knowledge, Hajime would be unable to decipher anything here.

「Can't be helped. I'll go with Transmute like usual.」

He tried to pull and push the door to no avail. As usual, he decided to use Transmute to force his way in. Hajime placed his right hand on the door and began.

However, at that time, Bachii!

「Uwa!?」

A red electric discharge ran through the door into Hajime's hand. Smoke rose from his hand. While swearing, he quickly swallowed some Holy Water when an accident occurred.

Ooooooooooooo!!

Suddenly, a deep cry echoed throughout the room.

Hajime took some distance from the door and placed his hand on his waist holster so he could use Donner at any time.

The cries continued to echo; eventually, the source of the voice began moving.

「Well isn't this a bit cliched.」

While Hajime muttered and smiled to himself, the giants flanking the door began crumbling. The gray skin assimilated with the wall soon turned a dark green.

The one-eyed giants looked exactly like a cyclops from fantasy. 4 meter large swords appeared in their hand, though he did not know where they came from. Their eyes turned toward Hajime as they freed their buried lower body.

At that moment, a bullet made of Taur Ore accelerated through electromagnetism pierced the eye of the cyclops to the right, driving through its brain and running through the back of its head, crushing the wall behind it.

The cyclops on the left side stared at the dead cyclops, only to see the corpse convulse while falling forward. The shock from the impact shook the entire room, and the thick dust danced about.

「Sorry, it's not a villain's role to read the mood or wait.」

He was exactly like a demon. No, given the carnage Hajime had experienced once before, it was a natural reflex. Still, it was a pity for the (right) cyclops.

They were likely guardians for the door which sealed something within. Furthermore, it was deep in the Abyss where no one would happy to be visiting.

Perhaps the creatures were filled with joy, being able to answer their call of duty; however, one had its head blown off without so much as seeing its opponent. If not pitiful, what else could it be?

An expression of horror appeared on the (left) cyclops's face as it gazed at Hajime. Its eyes were clearly asking, 「What the hell did you do!」

Hajime glared at the unmoving (left) cyclops. The creature in turn, not knowing what a gun was, remained vigilant and lowered its waist to move at any time. 10 seconds, 20 seconds…

neither moved. Before long, the (left) cyclops grew temperamental and roared.

Shortly afterward, its face dove into the ground.

The moment it stepped forward, it lost strength in its leg and fell forward. In its confusion, the (left) cyclops tried to stand up violently, but it could not gather any strength.

The (left) cyclops groaned. Hajime approached it slowly. His footsteps were like a countdown. Hajime pressed the muzzle against the head of the (left) cyclops which stared at him. Without hesitation, he pulled the trigger.

Dopan!

The gunshot resounded throughout the room

Still, something unexpected happened. The (left) cyclops's body illuminated for a moment. Its skin had repelled the bullet.

「Mu?」

Hajime thought it used a unique magic. This magic apparently significantly increased its defense.

His mouth contorted as he looked at the fallen (left) cyclops which he felt was foolish.

Hajime took the muzzle away and drove a kick into the (left) cyclops's head. He had used "Strong Leg," a skill he learned from the kicking rabbit, to draw a beautiful arc right into the (left) cyclops. It forced the demon onto its back. He then pressed the muzzle against its eye.

「Wait a minute!」he could feel the (left) cyclops say, but Hajime ignored it and pulled the trigger. As expected, the bullet went through its head, the creature unable to strengthen its eye.

「Hmm, about 20 seconds. A little slow… maybe because of its size?」

Hajime looked at the cyclops as he analyzed the outcomes of his experiment.

It was the reason the (left) cyclops was suddenly unable to move. The reason was a "Paralyze Grenade." He made it using scales

from the moths above, and it released a small blast which would disperse the scales out, paralyzing the opponent. The (left) cyclops had not noticed. He had thrown it the moment it was paying attention to the death of the (right) cyclops.

「Well, that's fine. I'll harvest their meat later…」

Hajime looked at the door then used and thought for a moment. He used "Wind Claw" to dig out the magic core in the cyclops'

bodies. They were as large as a fist, and, ignoring them being covered in blood, he put them into the hollows on the door.

It was a perfect fit. Crimson light gushed out from the magic cores, entering th emagic formation. Something could be heard cracking, and the light calmed down. The magic spread throughout the room, causing the walls to glow.

Hajime's eyes were a little dazed as he cautiously and quietly opened the door.

There was not a single source of light behind the door. Darkness spread in the vast room. With the help of "Night Vision" and the light from behind him, Hajime was able to make out the room little by little.

Inside were two rows of pillars and stonework like glossy marble that would not lose to that in the Saint Church. A large stone cube was in the center of the room, reflecting the oncoming light, giving it a luster.

Hajime stared at the cube and noticed something growing in front of the center of the cube.

He opened the door wider to confirm his surroundings. Like a horror film, the door may very well have slammed shut once he entered.

However, before Hajime could fix the doors in place, the object moved.

「… Who?」

It was a husky voice belonging to a frail girl. Hajime stared at the center of the room in surprise. The object which “grew” out of the cube was now moving. With light finally piercing the darkness, the object was finally exposed.

「A… human?」

The “object” was a person.

Only her face could be seen, as every other part was buried within the cube. Her long, fair hair hung down, making the girl look like a ghost from a certain horror film. Red eyes exposed themselves from the gaps of her hair, like the moon hidden by the clouds. From her appearance, she looked to be around 12, 13 years old. Despite her dangling hair looking haggard, she was still beautiful.

Hajime stiffened unexpectedly. Her red eyes stared at him. Taking a deep breath, he spoke with a determined expression.

「Sorry. My mistake.」

As he said this, Hajime quietly tried to close the door. The fair-haired, red-eyed girl panicked and tried to stop him. Her voice, not used for years and could only be described as a mutter…

But she was still able to convey her desperation. 「W, wait! Please! Save me…」

「Nope.」

Hajime said that and continued to close the door. He really was a devil.

「Wh, why? I'll do anything… so please…」

The girl was desperate. Though he could only see her head, it was clear what her emotions were.

Hajime responded gloomily.

「Listen, this is deep in the Abyss. I can't possibly release someone who was clearly sealed here. It's definitely dangerous. Nothing else is here but the seal… and there isn't anything to help you escape. So…」

His argument was certainly sound.

He was hardly a normal person who would respond to the pleading of a captured girl without hesitation. The originally gentle Hajime would surely have helped her, though.

Being so coldly refused, the desperate girl raised her voice, on the verge of tears.

「No! Keho… I, I'm not bad! Wait…! I…」

Hajime continued to close the door. Shortly before he had completely closed it, he ground his teeth, wanting it to end even a

moment earlier. If he had been able to close it more quickly, though, he would not have heard her…

「They just betrayed me!」

Only a small crack remained

Still, the girl's cry reached him. The door came to a stop. Only a little light entered the dark room. 10 seconds, 20 seconds passed before the door opened again. Hajime stood there with a sour face, as if he had bitten into hundreds of bugs.

He had no intention of helping her. There must have been a suitable reason for her to be sealed here. There was no evidence to prove there was no danger, either. It was entirely likely he was being deceived by her. It was an appropriate decision to forsake her.

(What am I doing?) Hajime sighed inwardly.

His heart shook when she said she said "Betrayed." he should have left the past behind him. In this place, where trying to "Live" was beyond difficult, grudges were an unnecessary distraction.

If her words could affect him this much, it only meant there was a part of him which had not yet moved on. His conscience must have existed somewhere to sympathize with a girl under similar circumstances.

Hajime scratched his head as he walked up to the girl. Of course, he did not lower his guard.

「Betrayed, was it? Why would that be a reason to seal you? If what you said is true, why did they bother sealing you here?」

The girl was stunned when Hajime returned.

Through her abundant dirty hair, her red eyes stared at him. Hajime was irritated by her lack of response. 「Are you listening? If you're not going to talk, I'm leaving.」 As he turned, she gathered herself in her surprise and began explaining her circumstances.

「I am an Ancestral Vampire… I was given great power… and I used it to work for my country. But… one day… my retainers all told me I was unneeded. My uncle… became King… I was fine with that… but I was a danger to them because of my powers… They couldn't kill me… so they sealed me… in here.」

She spoke desperately, her mouth drying out bit by bit. Hajime groaned upon hearing the story. Her circumstances were certainly full of drama. There were a few things that bothered him, so he questioned her while suppressing his boiling emotions.

「You're royalty from some country?」 「… (Nod nod)」

「What do you mean by you couldn't be killed?」

「… Automatic Regeneration. Injuries heal immediately. Even decapitation.」

「… Th, that's quite an amazing ability… Is that your great power?」

「Not just that… Magic Manipulation… Don't need a formation.」 Hajime understood that part.

Magic Manipulation came to him after he ate a demon. Chants and magic formations were useless to him for strengthening his body. He did not need an incantation to transmute or for his other skills, either.

Still, in Hajime's case, it did not change his dependence on huge magical formations when using normal magic since he had no aptitude for magic. Since his Magic Manipulation skill did not help this, using normal magic was impractical for him.

If she had any magical aptitude, however, she could use powerful magic with ease and would be capable of foul play. While others prepared their chants and magic formations, she would launch a spell without them expecting it. It would not even be a fight. Also, though her immortality was likely not absolute, she was still a cheat even beyond the Hero.

「… Help me…」

While Hajime was thinking to himself, the girl pleaded once again.
「…」

Hajime quietly watched the girl. They stared at each other for an unknown period of time…

He sighed, scratched his head, and placed his hand on the cube sealing the girl.

「Ah.」

The girl noticed the meaning behind his action and opened her eyes wide. Hajime ignored her reaction and concentrated on his magic.

Crimson magic was released from his body. After eating demons, his magic had changed significantly, it was thicker and brighter.

Still, the cube resisted his transmutation. It was like the bedrock at the top and bottom of each level of the dungeon. Since the cube was not completely immune to his efforts, it slowly eroded the area around the cube.

「Guu, it's really resistant… but if it's me as I am now…!」 Hajime used even more of his magic, enough to power even a six-

phrase incantation. Finally, his magic penetrated the cube's defense, bathing the surroundings in crimson light.

Hajime needed more magic, enough to power a seven-phrase…

eight-phrase incantation. The stone began to tremble. 「Not yet!」

He fired himself up and poured even more magic in. If he was able to use an elemental spell, it would have been considered of the highest caliber. No, perhaps the amount of magic he expended would have gone even beyond that. The crimson light grew brighter. The girl kept her eyes open as she stared at Hajime and the bright light around them, not wanting to miss even a moment.

Sweat dripped from Hajime's body. It was his first time using so much power at once. If his control slipped for even a moment, his magic would run rampant. Even so, the cube did not deform. Hajime, desperately, released everything he had.

Hajime did not know why he was doing all this for a girl he only just met.

He could not help it because he did not want to leave her alone. Already, Hajime had dedicated his life to eliminating all his enemies and returning home, but… he asked himself before, 「What am I doing? 」He wanted to have a clear distinction on everything. 「I'll do what I want to do!」He became serious.

His body emitted a crimson light as he released all his magic. All his power was poured into this transmutation.

The cube around the girl slowly melted away. She was being released from her shackles little by little.

Her chest was bare, her waist, arms, and thighs appeared, no different from the day she was born. Though she was emaciated, she still had a mystical beauty to her. She dropped down after her

entire body was set free. She lacked the energy to even stand.

Hajime also sat down, his shoulders heaving and his breathing deep. A heavy sense of fatigue hit him with his magical reserves emptied out.

With his wild breathing and his shivering hands, he reached for Holy Water, but the girl stopped him, clenching his hand. It was a hand which lacked power, small, trembling. Hajime glanced at her to see her staring at him. Her face was expressionless, but her eyes told him everything.

With a small, quavering voice, she clearly said, 「… Thank you.」

What sentiment had been in her words? Deep within his supposedly blackened heart, a small light, which had not disappeared, emerged.

How much time passed as she held his hand? From Hajime's knowledge, Vampires died out several centuries ago. This was knowledge he picked up when studying this world's history.

Even when she spoke, her expression did not change. She had long forgotten how to express her emotions to others. She had spent centuries here alone in the darkness.

Furthermore, she had been betrayed by those she trusted. It was a testament to her fortitude that she did not go insane. Perhaps it was because of her Automatic Regeneration she mentioned before. If so, it truly was torture. She was not allowed to even go mad.

A wry smile appeared on Hajime's face after he drank some Holy Water. He returned to grasping her weak hands, to which she squeezed back in response.

「… Your name?」

The girl whispered to Hajime. Hajime finally noticed they had not introduced themselves.

「Hajime. Nagumo Hajime. Yours?」

「Hajime, Hajime,」she muttered his name again and again, as if etching it into her heart. She responded after thinking for a

moment.

「… A name, give me one.」

「Eh? What do you mean by that? Did you forget yours? 」 Hajime asked her because she had been imprisoned for so long,

but she simply shook her head.

「No need for my old name. The name Hajime gives me is good.」
「… Haa, even if you say that…」

She was likely going through the same thing when Hajime changed. She was throwing a way her previous self so she could live a new life with new values. Hajime changed due to his pain, hunger, and fear, but she wanted to change of her own free will. The first step in doing this was to get a new name.

The girl looked at Hajime expectantly. Hajime scratched his head, understanding it could not be helped. He told her the name he thought of.

「How about “Yue?” I don’t have much sense for naming, so I can think of a different one…」

「Yue? Yue… Yue…」

「Yeah, in my homeland, Yue means “Moon.” When I first entered the room, I thought your eyes shining through your hair looked like a moon floating in the night… how is it?」

The girl was surprised by his response. As expected, her face remained expressionless, but her eyes were shining with joy.

「… Mm. I'm Yue now. Thank you.」

「Yeah. For the time being…」

「?」

Yue released her hands from him and looked at Hajime. He took his overcoat off and gave it to her.

「Wear this. You can't stay naked forever.」「…」

Yue took his overcoat on reflex and looked at herself. She was completely naked. Everything was completely exposed, so she quickly wrapped herself in his coat, turning bright red. She looked up at him and muttered.

「Dirty.」「…」

Hajime chose to stay silent, since saying anything would only be digging his own grave. Yue happily wore his overcoat. Being only 140 centimeters tall, it was too large for her. Her hands held the hem of the coat as she had a pleased expression on her face.

When Hajime drank the Holy Water his vitality was restored and his brain was functioning at full capacity. Using "Physical Perception …" he froze. There was a powerful demon in the immediate area.

It was… right above them!

Hajime noticed its presence the moment it dropped from the

ceiling.

With every ounce of effort he could muster, he picked Yue up and used “Ground Contraction.” Looking back to where they were, he could see a large creature.

The demon was 5 meters long, had four large scissor-like arms, and eight legs. A sharp stinger was present at the tip of each of its two tails. It was more wise to think of them as poisonous. Feeling the strength clearly different from the other demons he had faced thus far, Hajime began sweating.

He had not caught it with “Physical Perception” when he entered the room. But it was present now.

The scorpion was released after Yue was freed from her seal. It was a last resort to prevent her escape. If he had left Yue by herself, he could likely have escaped.

He glanced at the girl in his arm. She was earnestly watching him, not minding the scorpion. Her eyes were calm like a water surface; she had resolved herself. Her eyes eloquently conveyed her feelings. Yue entrusted her fate to Hajime.

The moment their eyes met, the corners of his lips rose and his usual fearless smile returned.

Hajime, who did not care for others, felt sympathy for Yue. Light

still remained in his mostly broken heart. For this girl who was once betrayed, he would devote himself. If he could not respond to her pleas, he would be a disgrace of a man.

「Bring it on! Try to kill me if you can!」

Hajime quickly took the Holy Water out of his pouch, embraced Yue, and gave it to her to drink as he perched her on his shoulders.

「Umu!?」

The Holy Water flowed into her body from the test tube container. Her eyes watered having been force fed an unknown substance, but what surprised her most was that her vitality was being restored.

Hajime moved Yue from his shoulder to his back with his hand. Her feet were still weak, but she would soon recover. He did not want to fight while protecting her.

「Hold on tight, Yue!」

Her body was far from top condition, but she used what power had returned to hold tightly to Hajime's body.

The scorpion made a noise as it advanced toward them. Feeling Yue grip his back, he smiled boldly.

「If you're going to get in my way… I'll just have to kill and devour you!」

Hajime declared his intent to accept this battle as he fired at the

scorpion. A purple liquid jettisoned from the needle on the scorpion's tail. Hajime jumped aside immediately, only to see the floor where he once stood dissolve. The liquid was an acid.

After looking around at the surroundings, Hajime shot Donner. Dopan!

He shot Donner at full power. The bullet traveling 3.9 kilometers per second smashed into the scorpion's head and exploded.

Hajime could feel Yue's astonishment through his back. With a weapon she had never seen before, he fired a flash of light. There were no signs of magic. Rather, it seemed like thunder was running through his right hand without the use of a magic formation or aria. In a word, Hajime was like Yue, able to manipulate magic directly.

They were "the same," and they were both in the Abyss. She ignored the scorpion and focused only on Hajime.

Hajime continuously moved around with "Air Walk." He had a never-before seen grim expression on his face. With "Physical Perception" and "Magic Perception," he could see the scorpion had not moved at all.

The needle on one of its tails was aimed at him. The tail swelled for a moment, discharging a needle at tremendous speed. When Hajime was about to dodge, the needle exploded like

buckshot. 「Gu!」

Hajime groaned as he emptied Donner, swept away with “Strong Leg,” and cleaved the surroundings with “Wind Claw.” Even under such pressure, he was able to get shots off with Donner. After firing Donner, he threw it into the air and hurled a grenade from his pouch.

The scorpion endured the attack from Donner. It prepared to unleash its acidic needle once again. But before then, a grenade about 8 centimeters in diameter exploded nearby. The grenade scattered burning tar on the scorpion.

It was an “Incendiary Grenade.” The reagent used to cause the scorching was the Fulham Ore Hajime had found long ago, able to spread flames at 3000 C.

Using this chance, Hajime landed on the ground and quickly reloaded Donner.

The tar had burned through, and smoke came off the scorpion’s body. It was damaged, but it was also enraged.

「Kishaaa!!!」

Using its eight legs, it rushed forward fiercely with a scream. The four arms it possessed stretched forward and shot toward Hajime and Yue like a cannon.

He escaped from one arm with “Ground Contraction” and jumped away from another with “Air Walk.” The third attack he parried with “Strong Leg,” but his posture was thrown off, allowing the

fourth arm to approach.

Suddenly, he shot Donner, using the force from the attack to twist his body. These movements put pressure on Yue, but she was able to tolerate them and held on.

While in the air, he jumped on the scorpion's back. Hajime was able to balance himself and fired Donner at point blank range.

Zugan!!

A terrible explosion ripped through the area, slamming the beast into the ground

However, only its shell was scratched, no true damage had been done. Clenching his teeth, Hajime prepared "Wind Claw" with Donner. When his ability clashed with the scorpion's armor, he was still unable to surpass its shell.

Fed up with this, the scorpion fired numerous needles at its back. Hajime immediately jumped aside and fired at the needle tip

which was launched. The bullet hit the tail, forcing it to the side. Even so, there was no damage to its shell. He was lacking in offensive power.

The demon's four arms began attacking Hajime again like a storm. In desperation, Hajime quickly jumped back while throwing an

“Incendiary Grenade.” Once again, the tar scattered over the scorpion, but this would only delay its movements.

When he was thinking about what to do, he heard an unprecedented scream from the scorpion.

「Kiiiiiii!!」

Chills ran through his body and he immediately retreated with “Ground Contraction;” however, he was too late.

The surrounding terrain wavered as countless splinters were shot up from the ground.

「Damn it!!」

It was a complete surprise.

Hajime desperately escaped into the air, but he had to twist his body to protect Yue from the incoming attack. He was able to dodge in the end with Donner and “Strong Leg,” but this gave time for the scorpion to prepare its next needle acid attack again.

Hajime went stiff.

With its preparations complete, the scorpion fired off its acid needles from both tails. Hajime steeled himself. In this situation, he could only clench his teeth.

He crossed his right arm and left arm, despite it only being up to his elbow, to defend his vitals while dodging with “Air Walk” as much as possible. He used Donner to defend his body, and strengthened

his body as much as he could by manipulating his magic to tighten his muscles.

Next, sharp needles deeply pierced into Hajime's body. 「Gaaa!!!」

Though he screamed, he had managed to avoid any fatal wounds. Because Yue was on his back, he had done his best to catch the needles so they did not pierce through his entire body.

Hajime was blown away by the impact and rolled on the ground, intense pain assaulting his body. Yue was flung away from the shock.

With needles in his body, Hajime endured the pain and took out a "Flash Grenade" and lobbed it at the scorpion. It drew an arc and exploded right before its eyes.

「Kishaaaaaaa!!」

Blinded by the sudden flash of flight, the scorpion instinctively drew back. Because it had been monitoring Hajime's movements visually since the beginning, throwing this out was the right thing to do.

Hajime pulled the needles out of his body and consumed the Holy Water in his molar.

「Guuu!」

A groan leaked between his clenched teeth. Despite the pain being large, it was not enough to break him.

Hajime looked for Yue as he pulled out the needles, but she had found him first and approached.

「Hajime!」

Yue ran up to him anxiously. Her expressionless face was gone; she was close to bursting in tears.

「I'm fine. His armor is too hard, though, I can't think of a strategy… His four arms cover his mouth and eyes, too…

maybe a kamikaze attack?」

Despite Yue's worries, Hajime continued to mull over the fight. She looked at Hajime, about to cry.

「… Why?」「Hm?」

「Why don't you just run?」

If he left her, he might escape. Yue brought up the topic because she knew it was possible. However, Hajime only looked at her skeptically.

「What are you saying? Just because a strong enemy's showed up, you shouldn't be giving up.」

Hajime, in order to survive, was willing to do anything. He would bluff, lie, perform surprise attacks, commit foul play, whatever he needed. His fight with the claw bear was the only exception. Otherwise, he felt fair play was a pointless thing. This was neither the time nor place for such naive thoughts. There was no need for guilt, only the desire to live.

Still, he was not going to allow himself to become heartless. He still had his humanity. He remembered it. What reminded him, what let him regain this, was Yue.

For that reason, he had no choice but to save her. She entrusted herself to him. The moment he accepted that, he could no longer be heartless.

Yue nodded at him, understanding more than he had said, and embraced him.

「O, oh? What's wrong?」

This was not the situation or time for doing this. The scorpion would recover soon. His wounds had healed, but he needed to prepare for the upcoming combat.

Yue did not care and placed her hand on his neck. 「Hajime… Trust me.」

Yue kissed the nape of Hajime's neck.

「!? 」

No, it was not a kiss. He was bitten.

Hajime felt pain in his neck as well as discomfort as power was being drained from him. He tried to shake free, but recalled Yue had introduced herself as a vampire.

“Trust Me” — it was frightening when a vampire said that before she sucked his blood; even so, he could not just run away or complain.

Hajime smiled bitterly and supported Yue by embracing her. For a moment, Yue trembled, but she soon buried her face deeper into his neck and hugged him tightly. Perhaps it was his imagination, but he thought she was happy.

「Kishaa!!」

The scorpion’s call echoed. It recovered from the flash grenade. Waves in the ground began forming around them. This magic was likely a unique magic that allowed it to manipulate the terrain.

「But that’s my forte as well.」

Hajime put his right hand on the ground. The waves stopped 3 meters from him as a wall of stone enclosed the two.

The conical spears assaulted the two from all directions only to be stopped by his defensive wall. Each time the splinters hit, the wall broke, but Hajime replaced it immediately.

As for scale and strength, the scorpion was beyond Hajime; however, Hajime was faster. 3 meters was the limit of his range, but the splinters failed to hit them.

Hajime concentrated on defending with transmutation when Yue finally released her mouth from his neck.

She licked her lips in delight. Her gesture was somewhat glossy despite her young figure. How should he interpret this, there was no sensation like before that came from her emaciated body; rather, her pale skin was now like porcelain. There was color in her cheeks, and her bright red eyes were warm as she placed her thin, small hand on Hajime's cheek.

「… Thank you for the meal.」

As she said this, Yue raised one hand to the scorpion. In that moment, an enormous amount of magic, not matching her delicate frame, erupted — her magic flickered gold, invading the darkness.

Yue, surrounded by this mysterious color, her golden hair waving in the magic of the same color, muttered a single phrase.

「"Azure Sky."」

A sphere of blue-white flames, 6 to 7 meters in diameter, formed above the scorpion.

The scorpion screamed in pain from the heat, trying to retreat. But the Blood Sucking Princess of the Abyss would not allow it.

She extended her beautiful finger, waving it about gracefully like a baton. The sphere of pale blue flames executed the conductor's instruction, hitting the scorpion directly.

「Gugyaaaaaaa!?」

A scream escaped from the scorpion as it writhed in agony. The pale blue sphere exploded in a flash of light. Hajime simply looked at the sublime magic in amazement while protecting his eyes with his arms.

Soon, the flames dispersed and the magic ended. There, in the center, was the scorpion, its outer shell scorched, the surface melted, the scorpion itself writhing in agony.

It had not melted even from the 3000 C “Incendiary Grenade,” nor did it dent from a shot from a rail gun at point blank rage, yet Yue’s magic broke it. Hajime wondered if he should praise the scorpion’s durability or Yue who easily broke through its defenses with her magic.

Hajime heard a sound which pulled him away from his thoughts. Yue sat down, breathing heavily. She had depleted her magic reserves.

「Yue, you okay?」

「Mm… Supreme Rank… tiring.」

「Ha ha, you did it, though. You saved us. I’ll take care of the rest, so you take a break.」

「Mm, do your best.」

Hajime waved his hand and used “Ground Contraction” to shorten the distance. The scorpion was still alive. While the outer shell had melted, it was roaring with anger, aiming its next attack at Hajime.

Hajime quickly threw a “Flash Grenade” and fired Donner before it could release its needles. He shot the “Flash Grenade” with his bullet, not accelerated by electromagnetism, causing it to explode.

The scorpion, familiar with the experience now, did not waver and searched for Hajime in the area painted in light.

No matter how much it looked, it could not find him. Suddenly, Hajime landed on its back.

「Kishaa!?」

It expressed its astonishment, unsure of how his presence had disappeared only to show up on its back.

When the “Flash Grenade” exploded, Hajime had used “Presence Interception” to hide himself and jumped on the scorpion’s back.

Hajime was burnt as the outer shell of the scorpion was still red hot; however, he did not mind it. He pressed Donner against the thin areas on the shell and emptied its chambers. The armor’s original durability was already gone, and now, the scorpion’s absolute shield crumbled before the might of his rail gun.

The scorpion lashed out its two tails without a care for hitting itself, but Hajime moved faster.

「I’ll still be eating you.」

Hajime took out grenades from his bag and forced them down the holes he created with Donner. He stuck his arm deep inside to leave the beast with its parting gift, ignoring the burns he had on his arm.

Before the scorpion could attack, he ran away with “Ground Contraction.” The scorpion faced Hajime to try to attack him again.

But its time had come to an end. Gobaa!!

A muffled explosion coursed through the room as the scorpion trembled. Hajime and the scorpion faced each other without moving, the silence continuing.

Slowly, the scorpion fell over, hitting the g round.

Hajime approached the immobile scorpion. He placed Donner into its mouth and fired three times to make sure it was dead. 「Good,」 he nodded. Doing this had become Hajime's habit these past few days.

Looking back, he saw Yue sitting and staring at him with an expressionless face, though her eyes betrayed her happiness. He did not know when his journey through the Great Labyrinth would come to an end, but he seemed to have acquired a reliable partner.

Pandora's Box was said to have contained hope beneath all the disaster when opened. It seems the metaphor he thought of before he entered the room was right on the mark. Hajime walked to Yue while thinking of this.

Chapter 4

Hajime brought the materials and meat from the scorpion and the cyclops back to his base. He had initially struggled with its bulk; however, when the exhausted Yue tasted his blood again, she quickly revived and was able to display superhuman strength. Thanks to that, the two were able to bring the items back.

They could have used the sealed room as well, but Yue adamantly refused.

It was no surprise, though, since she was sealed up there for so long. They would not be able to move anywhere until he replenished supplies, and it was best for her mental health that they escape.

At this time, they were chatting while he prepared his equipment.
「So you're at least 300 years old, Yue?」

「… Breach of manners.」

Yue eyed Hajime reproachfully. Talk of age was taboo for any woman in any world.

From his memories. Hajime recalled that vampires perished after a large war 300 years ago. Yue likely did not know her true age because she had no sense of time in the dark room. She was sealed when she was 20 years old, so she would have been at least a little over 300 years old.

「Do all vampires live that long?」

「… I'm special. "Automatic Regeneration" prevents aging…」

At the age of 12, Yue's ability to manipulate magic directly and her "Automatic Regeneration" manifested, stopping her from aging.

Because the common vampire consumed blood, they lived longer than other races. Even so, 200 years was their limit.

Humans lived, on average, for 70 years, while devils lived for about 120 years. For Demi-humans, lifespan generally depended on the tribe. An Elf could live for several hundred years.

Yue was considered one of the strongest in only a few years after she awoke her ancestral powers. At the age of 17, she was seated on the throne.

The magic which melted the scorpion's shell was shot in an instant, and she had a near-immortal body. She could be called a "God" or a "Monster." Yue said she was often called the latter.

Yue's uncle, blinded by his greed for power, spread rumors which caused others to view her as a monster. They tried to kill her, but her "Automatic Regeneration" did not allow her to die. At that time, they chose to seal her instead. She was shocked by the sudden betrayal. Too confused, she did not resist as they placed seals on her. By the time she realized it, she was sealed in the room, not knowing what methods they used to constrain her.

For that reason, she did not know much about the seal, the scorpion, or even that they were in the Abyss. Hajime was disappointed, realizing she did not know the way out.

They also talked about her powers. She had an aptitude in all attributes. Hajime was amazed by how much of a cheat she was, but she mentioned that she was weak in close combat. All she could do was run with her strengthened body while rapidly firing off spells. Because she had such powerful magic, however, it was not

such a large handicap.

She could essentially use any magic without incantation, though she mentioned the names out of habit. There were many people who used speech and behavior to clarify an image needed for magic, and Yue was no exception.

As for her “Automatic Regeneration,” it could be classified as a unique magic. If she had magic remaining, she would not die unless she was disintegrated in an instant. Conversely, any injuries she suffered while her magic was depleted would not readily heal. Her magic had been drained after all those years of being sealed, so Yue would very likely have died if the scorpion had hit her.

「Now then… this is important to know, but do you have any information on this place? Any escape routes to the ground?」

「… I don’t know, but…」

She also lacked knowledge on the Labyrinth. While apologetic, she continued her story with what little she did know.

「… It’s said one of the traitors made this Labyrinth.」
「Traitors?」

Hajime stopped transmuting hearing the unexpected word and glanced at Yue. She was watching him work and looked up when he stopped. He nodded to her to continue with her story.

「Traitors… They were followers of God who challenged him in

ancient times… They created these Labyrinths to destroy the world.」

Since Yue was an expressionless girl who did not talk much, her explanations took time. Hajime still needed more time to resupply though, and he needed to develop new weapons which could offset his weak offensive capabilities which were evident in his fight against the scorpion. While working diligently, he listened to her.

Yue continued her story. There were seven people who rebelled against God in order to destroy the world. However, when they failed, they fled to the ends of the world. The places they fled to were the current Great Labyrinths. One of them was this very【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】It was said one of the traitors lived in the depths of the Abyss.

「… If that's true, there might be a path out…」

「I see. I didn't think this Abyss was created. If it's magic from the Age of the Gods, it wouldn't be surprising to find some form of transportation magic which could lead us out.」

Hajime loosened his cheek with such a possibility existing. He returned his eyes to his hand and continued working. Yue, too, stared at his hand.

「… Is it that interesting?」

Yue simply nodded. The image of her wearing his oversized coat, her small hands on her knees, was incredibly charming. Her unbelievably well-featured appearance and her small stature made her especially cute, making him want to hold her on instinct.

(But she's really over 300 years old. As expected of another world. A loli-baba really does exist.)

Even if his personality had changed, he still had his old knowledge. As he unintentionally thought something unpleasant, Yue reacted.

「… Hajime, did you just think of something strange?」「No, nothing?」

Hajime feigned ignorance as he began to sweat from seeing her frightening woman's intuition. He tried to deceive her by working quietly. Yue left it alone, but suddenly asked a question.

「… Hajime, why are you here?」

It was a natural question. They were in the Abyss. It was truly a terrifying place. Except for demons, this was no place to live.

Yue wanted to ask about many things. She wanted to know why he could manipulate magic directly, why he could use unique magic, and how he could eat demon flesh and still live. She wanted to know about what happened to his left arm, whether or not he was human, as well as what weapon he used.

Bit by bit, Hajime answered her questions.

He may have been craving for a conversation partner after all this time alone. Their chat went on for some time. Yue was likely

someone Hajime wanted to dote on. Perhaps she was his last resort, preventing him from completely becoming heartless. He felt that way about her unconsciously.

Hajime spoke about how his class was summoned to this world. He was called incompetent by others at that time. He continued on, talking about the battle with the behemoth and his classmate's betrayal which led him to fall into the Abyss. He mentioned to her that he had eaten numerous demons, as well as his desire to fight the claw bear. He explained what the Potion (what Hajime named Holy Water) could do. He detailed how he developed his weapons by basing them on weapons from his home world.

「What is it? 」Gradually, he could hear Yue sniffling. When he looked at her, she was crying. Startled, Hajime instinctively reached out to wipe away her tears.

「What is this, so suddenly? 」

「… Gusu… Hajime… so poor… just like me… 」

She was apparently crying for him. He stroked her head with a wry smile after getting over his shock.

「Forget it. My classmates are inconsequential. Don't worry about the small stuff. What would I do if I went to get revenge? I'd rather put all my energy into surviving and finding a way home. 」

He snorted. Yue, who looked like a happy cat from the caressing Hajime was giving her, reacted to his words.

「… Going home? 」

「Hm? To my world, right? Of course I want to go home… I've changed a lot… but… I still want to go.」

「… I see.」

Yue looked down with a sunken expression and muttered to herself.

「… I don't have a place… to return…」「… 」

Hajime scratched his head with the hand that was brushing Yue's head before.

He was not that dense. Yue was looking for a new place to belong. That was the reason she wanted a new name. If Hajime left this world, Yue would be alone again.

Hajime thought to himself, 「Even after I decided I'd work to achieve only my own goals, I guess I'm still soft,」as he returned to stroking her head.

「Ah～ If that's the case, want to come with me?」「Eh?」

Yue opened her eyes in surprise. He could not calm down after seeing her red eyes, wet with tears, so he began speaking rapidly.

「I mean my home world. It's a world with average people; it'll be rough without a family registration… and with how I am now, I'm

not sure what will happen… but if you want to… 」

Yue was stunned for a moment, but her mind eventually caught up. Timidly, she asked, 「Is that really okay? 」Her eyes could not hide the expectation dwelling within.

They were sparkling. Hajime nodded. As if her expressionless face up until this moment was a lie, a smile bloomed on her face. Hajime was mesmerized. When he noticed, he panicked and shook his head.

He was unable to look at her, so Hajime devoted himself to his work. Yue took great interest, so the amount of distance shortened…

Hajime persuaded himself not to mind, even when she was sticking to him.

「… What is this? 」

Little by little, Hajime finished transmuting different parts. Amongst the pieces scattered about was a 1 meter long cylindrical pipe as well as a red bullet, 12 centimeters in length. It was the weapon Hajime was developing to compensate for the power Donner was lacking.

「This is… an Antimatter Rifle: Rail Gun version. You saw my gun, right? This is a more powerful version. The bullets are specially made. 」

When all parts were assembled, the rifle's full length was 1.5 meters. Hajime thought about what he could do to increase his firepower. Electromagnetic acceleration and combustion was the limit for Donner. The weapon itself could not be improved much due to its design. As such, he made a new gun.

Naturally, to increase power, he decided to increase the caliber and lengthen the barrel, which led him to accelerate for a longer period of time.

It truly was like a rifle. It could only hold one shot at a time, but its power was, theoretically, enormous. Donner already had ten times the destructive power of a normal gun, and this monstrous gun could very well crush a human body.

The new rifle — Schlagen — in theory, was ten times stronger than Donner… theoretically.

The scorpion shell was used as material. He was able to use the shell after analyzing it with "Mineral Appraisal."

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「Yue, food's ready… is it bad? Will eating this cause any pain for you…? Are Vampires fine with it?」

Demon meat had become a daily meal for him. Hajime invited Yue to eat, but he wondered if it was safe for her to eat. Yue shook her head and said, 「I don't need the meal.」

「Well, you have been sealed for 300 years without eating and lived… Don't you feel hungry?」

「I feel it… but I'm okay.」

「Fine? Did you eat something?」

Hajime looked at her belly with a questioning gaze. Yue pointed at Hajime.

「… Mm. Hajime's blood.」

「Ah, my blood. That would mean a Vampire's meal is pretty much just blood?」

「… We can also eat… but blood is more effective.」

It seems that as long as they drank blood, a Vampire would be fine. She had sucked Hajime's blood earlier and was satisfied. Convinced by the answer, he looked at her. For some reason, she was licking her lips.

「… Why are you licking our lips?」 「… Hajime… delicious…」

「D, delicious, I thought I'd taste bad since I've eaten so much demon flesh.」

「… Mature taste…」「…」

Based on Yue's description, his blood had a heavy, deep taste, similar to a soup. His was akin to a dense soup filled with plenty of vegetables and meat.

She fell into a trance the first time she sucked his blood. This was not his imagination. After starving for so long, any dish would be the finest.

Hajime wanted to stop her from licking her lips in such a bewitching matter. He realized Yue was older; even so, seeing such a childish figure act in such an immoral way was a supreme combination.

「… Delicacy.」

「… Please pardon me.」

His partner may have been dangerous in a number of ways. Hajime broke out in a cold sweat.

His partner might be a little dangerous in many ways. Hajime broke out a cold sweat.

At the time when Hajime met Yue and had a desperate struggle against the scorpion,

Kouki's group, the Hero Party had once again entered 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】The only ones present were Kouki's group, the small time villain group, and a group of five boys and girls led by Nagayama Juugo, a large boy who practiced Judo.

Their reasoning was simple. Even if they did not want to talk about it, Hajime's death had cast a shadow over their hearts. They were strongly affected by his "Death in Battle," and they now had difficulty fighting. They had been struck by trauma.

Of course, they did not concern the Saint Church with this. If they could experience actual combat again, they would likely be able to fight again. Every day, they pushed themselves to return to who they once were.

However, Aiko-sensei protested against what they were doing. Aiko had not participated in the expedition. She was of the rare

and special "Cultivator" class, and the Saint Church wanted her to get involved with agricultural development. She would be able to help solve their food issues.

She had fallen asleep in her bed after receiving news of Hajime's death. While she stayed in the safety of the city, her student had died. They would be unable to return to Japan with everyone. For Aiko-sensei, who had a strong sense of responsibility, it was a shock. For that reason, she did not allow her students into the

battlefield.

With her class, she would be able to change the world's food crisis. She, in the meanwhile, protested the training the students were going through with her indomitable resolve. Not wanting their relationship to worsen, the Saint Church gave in to her protests.

As a result, the Hero Party, the small time villain group, and Nagayama's party continued training as they wished for it. They wanted to challenge 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】again. This time, Meld and several of the knights attended.

It had been 6 days since they entered the Labyrinth.

They were currently at Floor 60, just 5 flors above the highest recorded achievement.

However, Kouki's group had come to a standstill. Rather than not being able to advance, they kept having nightmares of what happened that day.

Though it was a different cliff, the one they were at still had a similar feel. They had to pass over a long bridge connecting either side. This itself was not a problem, but they could not forget. Kaori, in particular, did not move as she stared into the Abyss.

「Kaori…」

Shizuku called out to her in worry. Kaori shook her head slowly as she smiled to Shizuku.

「I'm fine, Shizuku-chan.」

「I see… Please, don't overdo it. There's no need to hold back with me.」

「E he he, thanks, Shizuku-chan.」

Shizuku gave her best friend a smile. Kaori's eyes gave off a strong light. There was no despair or escapism there. The insightful Shizuku, sensitive to the subtleties of a human, knew Kaori was telling the truth.

(Kaori really is strong.)

Hajime's death was almost a certainty. It was naive to say he survived. However, Kaori had convinced herself to press forward, and Shizuku was proud of her best friend for that.

Even so, the person with the most heroic qualities could not read the mood. Kouki thought Kaori lamented over Hajime's death as she stared into the Abyss. He concluded that the gentle Kaori suffered from the death of a classmate. His beliefs had filtered his thoughts, making him believe Kaori was forcing herself.

Kaori thought Hajime was special, believing in the slim chance of his survival, yet Kouki had not even for a moment believed there was a chance. He tried to offer words of comfort to her.

「Kaori… I like your kindness. But you can't always be caught up in his death! You need to move forward. I'm sure that's what Nagumo would have wanted.」

「Wait, Kouki…」

「Shizuku, please be quiet! Even if this is harsh, don't stop me just because you're a friend… Kaori, it's fine. I'm by your side. I won't die, I won't let anyone else die. I promise you won't have to be sad anymore.」

「Ha～ Reckless as always… Kaori…」

「A ha ha, it's fine, Shizuku-chan… I know what Kouki-kun is trying to say, so it's fine.」

「I see, so you do understand!」

Kaori could not help but to smile wryly at Kouki's misunderstanding.

Even if she told him how she truly felt, it would not get through to him.

Hajime had already died in Kouki's mind. He would not understand why she was training so hard or that she was taking this expedition into the Great Labyrinth because she believed Hajime survived. Kouki was not one to doubt his own beliefs, and he would see Kaori's feelings as a denial of reality.

They had known each other for a long time, so Kaori was familiar with how Kouki thought. For that reason, they both remained silent.

He thought his words were the only way to persuade her; he had no ulterior motive. Kaori and Shizuku was used to his behavior, but many a girl would have fallen for his sweet mask and atmosphere.

Normally, a pretty boy with such a good personality and talent would be liked by his childhood friend. In Shizuku's case, she had trained in the adult dojo since she was small due to her strict father, and, due to her insight, she knew Kouki's sense of justice was a shortcoming. As such, her feelings never reached beyond that of friends. The same could be said of Kaori.

Shizuku had often talked to Kaori about how dense she was when it came to love, which was why Kouki's behavior had no effect on her. He was a good person, an important childhood friend, but there was no romance there.

「Kaori-chan, I'll cheer you on. Ask if you need anything.」「That's right～ Suzu will always be Kaorin's ally!」

To the side, having heard Kouki, Taniguchi Suzu and Nakamura Eri joined the conversation. After they entered high school, the two had become close friends with Kaori. They had also joined the party Kouki led.

Nakamura Eri was a beautiful bespectacled girl with black hair styled in a natural bob. She had a gentle character and was typically someone who stood in the back and watched everything quietly. Eri loved books. She gave off the book committee vibe, and, truthfully, she was a part of it.

Taniguchi Suzu was a petite girl at 142 centimeters tall. She was a bundle of energy, making many wonder where she stored it all in her small frame. Suzu was always happy and hopping about. Her heartwarming appearance made her the class mascot.

They understood what Kaori felt the day Hajime disappeared, so they supported her decision.

「Yeah, Eri-chan, Suzu-chan, thank you.」

Kaori smiled at her two close friends she had made in high school.
「Uu～ Kaorin is brave～ Nagumo-kun! Suzu feels sorry for Kaori-chan! If you aren't alive, Suzu will kill you!」

「S, Suzu? I don't think you can kill him if he isn't alive, right?」
「Don't worry about the details. If he's dead, we can use Eririn's Necromancy!

「S, Suzu, you have no delicacy! Kaori-chan believes Nagumo-kun is alive. Also, my Necromancy is…」

Suzu ran wild and Eri admonished her. It was their typical behavior.

Kaori and Shizuku were happy seeing the two. Though Kouki was not that far, he did not hear their conversation. Naturally, Kouki had an innate hearing loss skill which activated when there was an important conversation or word being said.

「Eri-chan, I don't mind it.」

「Suzu, that's enough. You're troubling Eri, aren't you?」

Suzu puffed her cheeks out when Kaori and Shizuku laughed. Eri was relieved to see Kaori had not taken Suzu's words seriously. Her face blanched at the mention of Necromancy.

「Eririn, is Necromancy no good after all? Even though it's such a unique class…」

「… Yeah, I'm sorry. If I could use it properly, I'm sure it would be a great help…」

「Eri, everyone has strengths and weaknesses. You have a high aptitude for magic, so don't worry about it.」

「That's right, Eri-chan. Even if its your class, everyone has preferences and talents. Your precise and accurate magic is really helpful.」

「Yeah, but it's best if I overcome this. I want to help everyone a little more.」

Eri grasped her small hands into a fist to express her determination. Suzu hopped about, saying, 「That's the spirit, Eririn!」 Shizuku and Kaori could only smile at their friends' perseverance.

Eri was a “Necromancer.”

Dark Magic was associated with the spirit and thought. It was a class which focused on inflicting status effects in battle.

Necromancy was an extremely difficult field of Dark Magic, since it acted upon the residual thoughts of the dead. There were a few priests in the Saint Church who practiced it. They drew up residual thoughts of the dead and conveyed them to the bereaved family.

However, that was not the true essence of this magic. The real power of this magic was its ability to give these residual thoughts to a corpse and control them like puppets. Even so, the revived dead would have a deteriorated level of skill from their life. There were even ways to control or possess living humans in this field of magic as well.

The puppets would only respond to a certain extent, and they were often inanimate and pale like a ghost. On top of this, Eri felt it ethically wrong to use the dead like this, so she did not delve deeply into this part of Necromancy.

There was someone watching Kaori amongst the four girls from the rear guard with dark eyes.

That someone was Hiyama Daisuke. When they returned to the Kingdom and the students had calmed down, there were many who wanted to blame Hiyama for setting off the trap.

Expecting this, Hiyama prostrated himself and apologized. He knew arguing or anything else would not help. The time and place to apologize was also important.

The perfect time came when he was able to apologize to Kouki in front of everyone. He knew if he apologized to Kouki, Kouki would accept it and mediate things with the class.

His plan paid off, as the criticism aimed at him was dispersed. Kaori was originally kind, so she did not particularly blame Hiyama who had apologized in tears. Everything went as planned.

Even so, Shizuku noticed his underlying motive. She was disgusting to see him use her childhood friends.

Hiyama was now following the orders of a certain person. They were terrible, horrifying orders. Hiyama wanted to avoid this at all costs, but he had crossed the line. He could not stop now.

Even so, Hiyama had delight and fear for the person who drew up such a terrible plan, even when blending in with the class so naturally.

(They're mad… but Kaori will be mine if I stick with them…) He would have Kaori if he just followed orders. Hiyama smiled

with these dark thoughts.

「Hey, Daisuke? What's wrong?」

Kondo, Nakamura, and Saito looked at him dubiously. They were still with Hiyama; as they say, birds of a feather. Hiyama looked at

them awkwardly for a moment, quickly returning to his friendly attitude.

Whether or not the friendship was true or not was a delicate matter.

「N, no, it's nothing. I'm just happy we got past Level 60.」「Right. Only five more and we'll beat the record～」

「We're definitely getting stronger, too. The group that stayed behind has no guts.」

「Don't say that. We're special, after all.」

The three did not question Hiyama's deception.

The people who continued fighting while thinking they were special, lost in their arrogance, were villains. They had a large attitude compared to those who remained in the Royal Palace. They complained about others in a condescending mood as well; even so, they were able to get past Level 60, so it was not like anyone could stop their attitude.

Unlike them with their boisterous attitude, Kouki's side remained quiet. With the Hero Party's quiet atmosphere, Hiyama's party simply seemed like an accessory.

Finally, without going through much trouble, the group reached Level 65.

「Brace yourselves! The map here is incomplete. We won't know what will happen.」

Commander Meld's voice sounded. Kouki's group tightened their expression and stepped into the unknown.

After advancing for some time, they entered a large hall. Everyone had a bad feeling.

That feeling proved true. A 10 meter magic formation appeared in the center of the room as they entered, pulsating with crimson energy. It was a familiar sight.

「N, no way… Is it that guy?」

Kouki cried out while in a cold sweat. The other members also looked tense.

「Seriously? Didn't that guy die?」

Ryuutarou shouted, full of surprise. Commander Meld responded with a calm and stern expression.

「The origin of the demons in the Labyrinth are unknown. Even if you defeat it once, it will return. Careful! Don't forget to secure an escape route!」

They wanted to be able to escape for sure if there was an emergency so Commander Meld issued commands accordingly. His

subordinates obeyed, but Kouki spoke his mind.

「Meld-san. We aren't the same as before. I'm far stronger now. I won't lose again! I'm sure we can win!」

「Heh, that's right. We won't always lose. This is our revenge match!」

Ryuutarou shouted out with a fearless smile. Commander Meld simply shrugged his shoulders, realizing nothing could be done about it. With their current abilities, they would be fine. He had the same smile as they had.

The magic formation finally lit up and exploded. Their nightmare appeared before them.

「Gugaaaa!!!」

The beast gave a roar and stomped at the ground. Its gaze, full of a fierce intent to kill, was aimed at Kouki's party.

There was a single girl who returned its gaze, ignorant of the tension building up in the others. One girl stared at it resolutely, ignoring everything else.

That girl was Kaori. Unheard by anyone, she made a declaration to herself.

「I won't let you take anyone else. I will overcome you and go

down to him.」

Now began their fight to conquer their pasts.

Kouki made the first move.

「Myriad of Soaring Wings, Reach the Heavens, “Soaring Flash!”」

The curved cut of light struck the behemoth.

Before, he was unable to injure the Behemoth with the Advanced Rank magic, “Heaven’s Might,” but he wanted to show he was not the same as back then, and he was able to prove so.

「Gurgaaa!?」

A diagonal cut appeared on the behemoth’s chest. It scraped the ground and screamed as its dark red blood dripped.

「We can do it! We’re definitely stronger! Nagayama, all of you take the left, Hiyama, you guys handle the rear, Meld-san, go right! Rear guard, ready your magic! Advance Rank, please!」 Kouki rapidly gave out instructions. It was a result of Commander

Meld’s training.

「Oh, those are some good instructions, and there was no

hesitation. Did you hear? Everyone, follow Kouki's command!」

Commander Meld shouted and ran to the right side of the behemoth with his knights. Everyone began moving to encircle the behemoth.

The vanguard quickly formed a defensive line, desperately preventing the raging behemoth from reaching the rear.

「Guraaa!!」

With a roar, the Behemoth stepped on the ground and crushed it underfoot as it charged.

「Like I'd let you!」「I won't allow it!」

Sakagami Ryuutarou and Nagayama Juugo, the two giants of the class, quickly huddled up against the behemoth and began wrestling with it.

「「Power to crush the earth, "Herculean Strength!"」」

Using their physical strength, improved by magic, they withstood the behemoth's rush, their feet sliding on the ground.

「Gaaa!!」「Raaaaa!!」「Ohhhh!!」

Each of the three cried out and tensed their muscles. The small humans were unable to completely stop the Bbehemoth, but they were able to kill its momentum. It stomped about in anger.

The other members did not miss this chance.

「Supreme light which cuts through all, “Absolute Sever!”」
Shizuku’s sword draw hit the behemoth in the horn. Even with a

sword artifact with sharpness aided by magic, it stopped midway and could not completely pierce through.

「Guu, as hard as ever!」

「Leave it to me! Crush, Rend, Blast, “Grand Destruction!”」
Commander Meld jumped in and flung his sword at Shizuku’s

sword which was stuck in the middle. The sharp, heavy blow enhanced by magic pushed Shizuku’s sword further forward.

With that, the Behemoth’s horn was severed.

「Gaaaa!?」

The Behemoth went wild with all its might, blowing four people away.

「Gentle light which embraces all, “Halo!”」

Countless nets of light shot forth and wrapped the four gently after they struck the floor and lost their breath. Kaori had used a shape-shifting defensive Light Magic which diminished shock.

In an instant, Kaori began chanting a healing spell.

「Divine blessing, Heal all the children, “Restoration!”」

Though the four did not experience it at the same time, they were all being healed. The magic was a ranged Intermediate Rank Recovery Magic . It healed multiple people at once. “Restore Heaven” was a much more powerful version of “Heaven’s Blessing” which she used before.

Kouki took a thrusting stance and rushed for the rioting behemoth. He stabbed his sword into its earlier wound as he finished his aria.

「“Light Burst!”」

The enormous magic stored in the Holy Sword flowed into the wound, causing an explosion.

「Gaaaa!!」

Blood flooded out of the wound. The behemoth brandished its sharp claws in the slight pause after Kouki executed his skill.

「Guu!!」

Kouki groaned and was blown away. The armor he wore reflected the attack, but the impact still passed through, causing him to cough. The pain was momentary, however, as Kaori healed him instantly.

「Divine blessing, Grant power to this person once again, “Restless Heavens!”」

While this spell lacked the efficiency of healing multiple people, it had a significant effect on single targets. Kouki recovered in an instant as light enveloped him.

The behemoth had blown the other party members away while Kouki had just been knocked back. Without minding its injury, it began glowing red.

「… It can use the spell, even with its horn gone. Here it comes!」 Shizuku warned the others when the behemoth jumped. Everyone had experienced the behemoth's unique magic.

However, its jumping distance was unexpected. The beast easily jumped over the vanguard and headed to the rear. It never jumped like that before, so they did not dream it could do so now. Everyone had impatient expressions.

However, Taniguchi Suzu in the rear stopped her chant and stepped forward.

「Herein lies a sanctuary, Enemies of God will not pass, "Heavenly Severing!"」

A dome of light appeared as the behemoth landed. A terrible shock wave spread around the area, breaking the ground beneath it.

However, the absolute defense Suzu created took the blow. Even so, her version utilized two verses of incantation rather than the

original four, so it was not as strong as the real thing.

The shield had cracks in it. If Suzu was not a “Barrier Master,” it would not have even formed. Suzu grit her teeth as she continued pouring magic into her spell.

She continued picturing the spell’s image in her mind as she held her hands up desperately. The cracks began disappearing from the barrier. She believed in her absolute defense.

「Uuuu! I won’t lose!」

The behemoth’s eyes, full of murderous intent, were squarely on Suzu. Her body shrunk back in fear, and her hands shook. She desperately shouted to keep herself going.

Still, she would not last more than another 10 seconds. It’s going to break! When Suzu thought that,

「Divine blessing, Guide your spirit here, “Yielding Heavens!”」
Suzu’s body was wrapped in light and her magic became more powerful, strengthening “Heavenly Severance.” This was Kaori’s Recovery Magic. The spell itself was often used to

restore magic power, the directing the flow in a magic formation to amplify the power. Though more of a support skill, Kaori could use it as a “Healer.”

「I can do it with this! I love you, Kaorin!」

Suzu poured in the original four verse worth of magic power into the shield to restore it perfectly. All the cracks disappeared instantly. The behemoth scowled in frustration. Though it pointed its anger at this impertinent caster, Suzu courageously glared at it in return without taking a single step back.

Finally, its horn released its red heat. The behemoth lost its momentum and fell to the ground. Suzu's "Heavenly Severance" ended at the same time.

The behemoth tried to aim at Suzu who was breathing hard, but the vanguard had already reacted.

「Rear guard, retreat!」

The group fell back at Kouki's instruction and the vanguard circled the monster. They took a hit and away tactic until the rear was able to complete their chants.

「Step back!」

Eri, representing the rear, gave a signal. Kouki and the others took distance.

After their retreat, an Advance Rank Fire Magic was released.

「「「「「"Scorching Sun"」」」」」

Five people had performed this powerful spell. High temperature flames gathered into a sphere and burned the surroundings like a sun. "Scorching Sun" was activated directly above the behemoth and was 8 meters in diameter. It immediately swelled and dropped onto the beast.

A tremendous amount of heat assaulted the behemoth; even their allies may have taken damage, so they quickly put up a barrier. The magic did not allow the behemoth time to escape, and soon, its powerful outer skin began melting.

「Gurgaaaaaa!!」

the Behemoth's death throes filled the hall. Its cries were earsplitting, but, soon, it was exhausted, burnt away by the flames.

In the center of the blackened area, all that remained were its remains.

「D, did we win?」「I think we won…」「We won…」

「Really?」「Seriously?」

Everyone was stunned. Bit by bit, mutters of victory spread throughout. Kouki, too, was stunned, and when he regained his presence of mind, he hoisted his Holy Sword above his head and straightened his back.

「That's right! This is our victory!」

The sword seemed as if it was responding to his feelings and began shining. With his victory cry, everyone cheered. The boys patted each other on the shoulders while the girls held each other. Commander Meld and his men stood impressed.

Shizuku called out to Kaori who was still staring where the behemoth once was.

「Kaori? What's wrong?」

「Eh, ah, Shizuku- chan… Right, it's nothing, I was just thinking about how far we've come.」

Kaori answered Shizuku's question with a wry smile. She was immersed in her emotions after defeating their previous nightmare, confirming her growing strength.

「That's right. We got stronger.」

「Yeah… Shizuku-chan. Nagumo-kun is further ahead…」

「You're going to check, right? That's the reason you did you best, after all.」

「E he he, that's right.」

To move forward, to determine Hajime's state, to find more information. She was afraid she would find no answer and became weak. Shizuku sympathized and held Kaori's hand. Kaori smiled in response to the forceful grip.

Kouki began approaching the two.

「Are you two okay? Kaori, your heals were great. If you're here, I have nothing to fear!」

He smiled refreshingly as he thanked the two.

「Yes, I'm fine. Kouki, you're… well, I guess you're fine as always.」 「Yeah, I'm fine, Kouki-kun. I'm glad I could help everyone.」

The two smiled in return. However, Kouki's next words cast a shadow in their hearts.

「With this, Nagumo can rest in peace. The people he defended

were able to get vengeance for him.」

「「...」」

Kouki did not notice Kaori and Shizuku's expression as he was immersed in his own emotions. In Kouki's mind, the only reason Hajime fell into the Abyss was because of the behemoth. There was no mistake to him, since the bridge collapsed because of the shock of the behemoth's attacks. However, the magic which hit Hajime was the true reason.

Right now, there was an unspoken agreement not to talk about that event, but the facts did not change. Kouki either forgot or was unaware of this fact and felt defeating the behemoth would allow Hajime to rest in peace. He believed in the good will in people. Those who were negligent could not be blamed forever.

Regardless, he would never have dreamed that someone had done the deed intentionally.

However, even if she did not mind it, she would not forget. She did not know "who" had done it, so she tolerated it. She would certainly torture the culprit severely if she knew. That was why she was shocked seeing how Kouki forgot that fact.

Shizuku sighed. She wanted to complain on reflex, but Kouki had no ill intentions. Rather, his words showed he was thinking about Hajime and Kaori. In a sense, it would be bad to stand up to him for that very reason.

Furthermore, their classmates were celebrating. Shizuku was a girl who could read the air, so saying anything now would not be good.

An energetic girl flew in despite the delicate atmosphere.
「Kaorin～!」

Suzu embraced Kaori after calling out to her. 「Fua!?」

「E he he, Kaorin, I super love you～! If Kaorin hadn't supported me, I would have been flattened～」

「R, really, Suzu-chan. Ah, where are you touching me!」「Ge he he, is this place fine? I guess this place isn't!?」 Kaori was embarrassed by what Suzu was saying as she got

carried away and began fondling Kaori's body like an old pervert. Shizuku gave a chop in response, smashing into Suzu's head.

「That's enough. Who do you think you are… Kaori is mine, isn't she?」

「Shizuku-chan!?」

「Fuu, I won't allow it～ Only Suzu can do these things with Kaorin!」

「Suzu-chan!? What are you thinking of!?」

Kaori was stuck between Shizuku and Suzu, quickly responding to both of them. The delicate atmosphere was now gone.

From this point on, they would be entering unexplored territory. They had moved beyond their past and now would advance.

「Ahh, Damn it!」 「… Hajime, fight.」

「You're too carefree!」

Currently, they were running through wild grass, Yue perched on his shoulder. The grass grew up to 160 centimeters, up to his shoulders. If Yue was walking in this, she would disappear.

As for why they were escaping,

「「「「「「「「「「「Shaaa!!」」」」」」」」」」」

Nearly two-hundred demons were chasing after them. After Hajime had finished resupplying, they had traveled 10

Floors. Hajime's equipment and skills were useful in their journey, and Yue's magic played a large role in their rapid progress.

Yue could use any magic, and Hajime supported her with his skills.

However, her Barrier and Recovery Magic were weak. Since she

had “Automatic Regeneration,” it had been unnecessary for her. As for Hajime, he had the Holy Water, so he was fine.

They had advanced to their current level. The floor looked like an extensive forest, lush and dense with trees over 10 meters tall. Though the air was damp, it was not like the jungle he experienced above.

When Hajime and Yue were searching for the stairs down, the earth began trembling. A demon, reminiscent of a Tyrannosaurus Rex, appeared before them

For some reason, there was a cute flower on its head…

Sharp tusks thirsting for blood surged from the powerful beast, and the sunflower-like object on its head provided for a surreal experience.

The Tyrannosaurus Rex gave out a cry and rushed at them. Hajime calmly took out Donner… but Yue raised her hand earlier.
「“Scarlet Spear.”」

A flame appeared in Yue’s hand which spiraled into a spear shape. The spear pierced through the dinosaur’s mouth, running through it and ending its life as the surroundings melted from the heat. The beast caused the ground to shake when it fell.

The flower fell off. 「… 」

Hajime stayed silent for a moment.

Yue seemed quite intense these days. In the beginning, she would devote herself to covering Hajime. However, as they journeyed further down, she instantly attacked any monster which opposed Hajime.

Hajime had not had a turn recently. He would step forward, but the battle ended before he could do anything. He was secretly anxious. At this rate, he would take a blow to his confidence.

He addressed Yue with a forced smile while he kept Donner in his hands.

「Ah～ Yue? It's good to be enthusiastic, but… I feel like I haven't done much recently… 」

Yue looked at Hajime. He could see pride in her expressionless face.

「… I want to be helpful… because we're partners… 」 It seems she was not content with just covering Hajime.

He did think they would travel together from now on, so they should rely on each other.

Back when he freed her, she had collapsed from using all her magic. Hajime had told her they would work together to comfort her… but his words remained etched in her heart. She wanted to show her worth as his partner.

「Ha ha, no, you've already helped me quite a bit. Your magic is powerful, so please take the rear. Close combat isn't your strong suit. The front is for me to handle.」

「Hajime… okay…」 Yue fell silent.

He smiled at her, who was trying too hard to be helpful, to show he did not dislike her and stroked her soft hair. Yue returned to usual, so Hajime could say nothing further.

He needed to be cautious because he did not want to become too dependent. While thinking that, he inadvertently spoiled himself. Hajime was amazed by his own actions.

In a sense, the two were flirting, but that was cut short when Hajime caught a demon with his "Physical Perception."

There were approximately ten of them approaching. From the movements of the leader, they would be two-tailed wolves. He wanted to check them out and urged Yue to move. Hajime was hoping to take the advantage of location since the enemy was moving in a large group.

When the demons tried to encircle him, Hajime rushed at one of them. Before he could finish it off, a 2 meter tall reptile dropped

from the overgrowth in the trees.

It was similar to a raptor, and there was a tulip blooming on its head.

「… Cute.」

「… Is this some kind of fashion?」

Yue muttered to herself as she felt deflated from seeing the odd imagery. Hajime looked toward the demon and murmured something impossible.

Both dinosaurs had these unknown flowers on them. As the creature growled, its blood lust spread. The flower swayed, fluttered…

「Shaaaa!!」

The Raptor stared at Hajime who was preoccupied with the flower. It had 20 centimeter talons attached to its robust legs, a heinous light reflecting from the talons.

Hajime and Yue stepped back, but separated to the left and right. Hajime jumped above the dinosaur with “Air Walk” and shot the

tulip as a test.

The flower scattered with the gunfire.

The dinosaur twitched for a moment and rolled over having failed its landing. It jumped at the tree and stopped moving. Silence filled

the scene. Yue came near Hajime as she looked at the dinosaur and the scattered tulip.

「… Dead?」

「No, it seems to be alive…」

Just as Hajime said this, the body began twitching. The dinosaur got up and saw the fallen tulip, stomping on it without a care for its enemies.

「Eh～ What's with that reaction?」「… Bullying?」

「No, it's not like it's a kid with a piece of paper on its back.」 When it was satisfied, it looked to the heavens as if saying 「Fuu～

That felt good!」and raised a cry. The dinosaur faced Hajime and was startled.

「Looks like it didn't know. It was in a trance.」「… Then it's bullying?」

Hajime verbally jabbed at the creature while Yue looked at it in sympathy. The dinosaur stood stiff for a moment before lowering its posture, exposing its fangs, and jumping. Hajime shot Donner at its open mouth.

The bullet pierced through its head and disappeared into the forest.

With the momentum of its jump, the dinosaur slid on the ground. Hajime and Yue looked at its corpse silently.

「Really, what was that?」

「… It was bullied, beaten… how sad.」

「No, that wasn't bullying, it definitely wasn't.」

Hajime stopped trying to figure things out since he did not understand how demons thought. They began moving to their advantageous location again since the demons were approaching.

Countless 5 meter thick trees stretched endlessly in the area they entered. Neighboring trees had their branches entwined. Hajime used "Air Walk" while Yue used Wind Magic to jump to the branches above. Hajime planned to exterminate the demons by sniping at them from above.

In less than 5 minutes, raptors appeared beneath them. Hajime intended to throw an Incendiary Grenade, but he froze. Yue also hardened despite her hand poised to release magic.

「Why do they all have flowers?」「Flower garden…」

There were more than ten raptors, and all of them had flowers on their head, a variety of colors, to boot.

Hajime unintentionally spoke up and attracted the attention of all the dinosaurs. They took stances to leap up.

Hajimetossed an “Incendiary Grenade” as he and Yue stayed out of their range to snipe at them with Donner, a white flash preceding every death. One by one, the raptors died, their heads blown off. Yue, likewise, was using “Scarlet Spear” to kill.

3 seconds later, the Incendiary Grenade exploded, spreading out tar blazing at 3000 C onto the raptors. Hajime heaved a sigh of relief, knowing his weapons would work on monsters of this level. The scorpion must have been special.

In less than 10 seconds, all the enemies had been cleared. Hajime had a dull look. Noticing this, Yue tilted her head and approached.

「… Hajime?」

「… Yue, isn’t this odd?」

「?」

「They were too weak.」

Yue also noticed after he pointed this out. The dinosaurs all had simple movements which made them easy to eliminate. Their unnatural actions were mechanical, as was even their blood lust. After watching the raptor trample on the flower in anger earlier, he felt the flowers themselves were unnatural.

When Hajime was about to tell Yue to move carefully, his “Physical Perception” caught more approaching demons. A vast number were gathering from all directions. With his “Physical Perception” now able to reach a 20 meter radius, he noticed everything was heading toward the two of them.

「Yue, this is bad. I'm picking up 30, no, 40 or more demons heading our way. Someone's ordering them to attack us from all directions.」

「… Run?」

「… No, not with this many. Let's exterminate them from above the tallest tree.」

「Mm… the big one.」 「Yeah, let's do it!」

Moving at high speed, they quickly found the highest tree in the area. They destroyed the thick branches that could help the demons climb upward.

Hajime calmly waited with Donner in hand. Yue gently grabbed the hem of his clothes. Since his hand was occupied, he used his body as a foothold for her. Her grip became a little stronger.

The first batch of demons arrived. It was not composed of just raptors, which used their talons to climb the tree, but also Tyrannosaurus Rexes, which rammed the tree.

Hajime fired Donner. He shot toward the ground to hit the climbing raptors. When Donner's chambers were exhausted, Hajime exposed the cylinder. With a single rotation, he used the ejection rod to clear the chamber and loaded the gun, holding it in his left armpit. It took him 5 seconds.

In this period, an "Incendiary Grenade" he dropped earlier exploded. Flames scattered about, which gave time for Donner to fire once again. Fifteen demons had been felled already, but that

was not enough.

An additional thirty raptors and four Tyrannosaurus Rexes gathered. They were trying to smash the tree or climb up to attack him.

「Hajime?」

「Not yet… just a bit more.」

Hajime answered as he continued shooting. She continued to concentrate on her magic, believing in him.

Finally, more than fifty demons had gathered below. At this point, it was hard to distinguish the precise number. He sent a signal to Yue to convey that the demons he sensed before were all

accounted for. 「Yue!」

「Mm! “Frozen Prison!”」

When Yue triggered her magic, the area beneath them froze and spread out. The blue ice which grew outward and encased the demons in a coffin of ice.

There was not even a moment to resist. The demons lost the light of life in their eyes. A square region 50 meters in dimension was frozen. Truly a spell worthy of being called “Annihilation Magic.”

「Haa… haa…」

「Good work. As expected of the Vampire Princess.」「… Ku fu fu…」

Hajime praised Yue. Just like the spell's name, it truly looked like a prison of ice. Yue ran out of magic after using the Supreme Rank Ice Magic. She gasped for breath in her fatigue.

He sat beside her and placed his hand on her hip to support her, presenting his neck to her. He was letting her drink his blood to help her recover. Though she could recover from the Holy Water as well, it took a lot longer for her. Blood was the best.

In spite of her deadpan look, Yue shined from Hajime's compliment. 「Ku fu fu,」 she lightly laughed as she blushed and placed her mouth against his neck.

However, Hajime stood up with a grim expression. He sensed more than a hundred demons.

「Yue, there are several times more now.」

「!?」

「Something's going on if it's this many. We just eliminated everything here, yet now there's another suicide attack… It's like they're being forced to… Maybe that flower…」

「…Parasite.」

「You think so, too, Yue?」 She nodded.

「… Main body.」

「As long as t hose flowers are there, they'll be puppets. We're up against everything on this floor.」

Before being crushed by the sheer numbers, Hajime decided to look for the main body. Without taking care of the demon, looking for the path to the next floor would be difficult. Still, there was the possibility they would find it along the way.

He had no time to allow Yue to suck his blood, so he gave her some Holy Water. Yue refused it and stretched her hands to the confused Hajime.

「Hajime… Carry.」

「How old are you, really! Are you trying to suck my blood while we move!?」

Hajime was correct as Yue nodded. The Holy Water was too slow for Yue, and it was something she thought they should keep in reserve for healing. He felt some resistance, but necessity knows no bounds.

He consented to carrying her… But since it would normally get in the way, he gave her a piggyback ride.

And that was how they reached their current situation.

They were being chased by close to two-hundred demons. The

thicket was troublesome, and, while Yue had finished her meal, she had not gotten off his back.

The demons were behind them. Dododododododododododo!!

Demons approached while leaving this noise. Dinosaurs traveled side by side while hiding in the tall grass, pouncing from all directions. Hajime ran to where he thought the most suspicious place was as he countered. Yue used her magic to prevent the siege from overwhelming them.

Kapu, Chuu～

The two glared at the forest exit ahead. On the other side was the wall of the Labyrinth. It looked like a cave with a crack spreading from the center.

They had made this their goal, since the demons had a specific habit in their movements. The demons became more violent when he escaped in a certain direction, so he advanced that way while countering. It was as if they were trying to lead the two away from this specific area.

Apparently, hiding in the grass had failed, so Hajime moved through the air with “Air Walk” and “Ground Contraction.”

Kapu, Chuu～

「Yue-san!? Can you stop sucking blood!?」「… Necessary.」

「That’s a lie! You aren’t even tired now!」「… Their flowers… I’m also… Kuu.」

「What's with that? Stop trying to shift the blame, I can't afford it!」

Despite the situation, Yue was obsessed with Hajime's blood. It was not odd that a former royal could not control herself. Though they were speaking lightly, Hajime continued to attack. Eventually,they jumped into the cracks.

The cave entrance was narrow enough for two average adults standing side by side. Of course, the Tyrannosaurus Rex could not fit through it, and the raptors could only enter one by one. One of the raptors approached and tore at Hajime with its claws, but Hajime shot Donner before it could attack and used his Transmute to block off the entrance.

「Fuu～ We'll be fine with this for a while.」「… Good job.」

「If you really feel that way, then isn't it about time you got down?」

「… Muu… No choice.」

Yue reluctantly descended. His back was quite comfortable.

「Now then, they were quite desperate. Must have hit the bull's

eye. Don't relax.」「Mm.」

The two advanced deeper into the cave.

They arrived in a large hall after traveling for some time. The cracks continued even into the depths of this hall. Perhaps it was the stairwell to he lower level. Hajime kept his guard up despite not feeling anything because he had an unpleasant premonition. There were many demons in this Labyrinth who could hide from his “Physical Perception.”

Then something happened when they arrived at the center of the room.

Countless green ping-pong sized balls flew at them. Yue and Hajime instantly stood back to back, intercepting them.

Hajime created a stone wall since the number surpassed the hundreds. It was strong enough to block the balls, since they were lacking in power. Yue was able to use Wind Magic to intercept them without a problem.

「Yue, it’s probably an attack from the main body. Do you know

where it is?」「…」「Yue?」

Hajime asked her if she knew its location. She did not have a skill like “Physical Perception,” but, as a vampire, she had sharper senses than him. However, she did not answer. Suspicious, Hajime called out to her…

「… Run… Hajime!」

Before he realized it, her hand was pointed at Hajime. Wind

converged in her hand. Instinct warned Hajime as he jumped aside violently. A strong blade of wind passed by where he had stood earlier, cutting his wall in two.

「Yue!?」

Hajime was caught by the surprise attack, but he understood why she did it when he saw the flower on her head. In all honesty, the crimson rose matched her well.

「Shit, was it those green balls!?」

He wanted to hit himself for his carelessness. He could only continue avoiding her wind attacks, though.

「Hajime… Uu…」

Yue's deadpan expression turned into a sorrowful one. When she shot a raptor's flower, it had stomped on it. In short, it was still conscious despite being manipulated. Only the body was deprived of its freedom.

He already knew how to free her, though. Hajime tried to aim at the flower and pull the trigger

However, Yue's body was moved to cover the flower. She moved around a lot, so there was the risk he would blow her face away. Hajime closed in to cut it, but Yue hit her own head.

「… That's some nerve you've got…」

It was a warning for Hajime to stay away. Yue would target herself

if he did not.

Yue was surely almost invulnerable, but he could not deny the fact that she might have a spell which could completely eliminate her body all at once. Yue would be able to fire off a Supreme Rank magic in an instant, too, so he wanted to avoid that possibility.

The demon appeared from the dark cracks, understanding Hajime's hesitation.

It was a mix of a woman and a plant, similar to a Dryad or Alraune.

There was a legend that dryads brought good luck when not hostile, and that they were beautiful women. However, the one before him did not give that impression.

It certainly did look like a human woman, but it had an ugly face, exposing its inner character. It also had countless vines waving about, giving off an eerie atmosphere. Her mouth was distorted in a grin.

Hajime pointed his gun at it at once. However, Yue entered his line of fire.

「Hajime… Sorry…」

Yue grit her teeth with a mortified expression. It was intolerable to be unable to control her body. She was resisting it desperately, blood dripping from her lips as she apologized. Her sharp fangs were likely the case; perhaps she was frustrated with herself, the curse, or perhaps both.

The alraune fired a green ball at Hajime while using Yue as a shield.

Hajime brushed it away with Donner. Though not visible, many spores scattered about.

However, there was no sign of a flower blooming on Hajime's body. The demon stopped grinning and looked at him in confusion. The spores had not worked at all.

(I guess it's because of all my resistances.)

As Hajime had guessed, the spores were a kind of neurotoxin. His "Poison Tolerance" allowed him to resist it. It was sheer luck for him; Yue was not to blame, she should not have felt so down.

Realizing the spores were useless, the demon ordered Yue to cast magic once again. Again, the blade of wind assaulted him; however, the demon was unable to fully utilize its victims. The dull movements of the raptors was evidence of this.

(It's a blessing in disguise.)

If he tried to avoid the wind, the alraune would threaten to hurt Yue. As such, he used "Strength of Gold," which he obtained from the cyclops to endure the blades. The skill covered his body in magic and solidified it. It was a reliable skill which lived up its name. Because he was still inexperienced, he could only display a tenth of its true strength. Even so, since the blades lacked any power, he was able to endure.

(I can settle this at once… but it'll be frightening afterward… or maybe I can throw an Incendiary Grenade?)

As Hajime pondered the situation, Yue raised a sorrowful cry.
「Hajime! I'll be fine… shoot!」

Yue had prepared herself for this. If she could not control herself, then she would rather have Hajime shoot her. She clearly had the will as she looked at Hajime.

There was no way he could do that. He would surely save her. In a situation like this, such hot lines would help the hero and heroine bond. Hajime would have done it before, too; however, the current Hajime was willing to disappoint such expectations.

「Eh, is that fine? That'll save me.」 Dopan!!

Gunfire echoed through the room.

When he heard Yue's words, he pulled the trigger without hesitation. Only a cold air and silence filled the room now. Rose petals danced in the air, falling to the ground.

Yue blinked in surprise. The alraune, too, was blinking in surprise. Yue placed her hands on her head to confirm the flower was

gone. Her fair hair had a slight burn to it. The alraune, understanding the situation, stared at Hajime, as if accusing him.

「No, don't look at me like that.」 Dopan!!

He shot his gun along with his words. The alraune's head exploded as it fell to the ground convulsing.

「So, Yue, you okay? No problems anywhere?」

Hajime confirmed Yue's safety in a laid- back manner. However, she

glared at him while stroking her head.

「… You shot.」

「Ah? Well, you did say to shoot.」 「… No hesitation…」

「Well, I did make the decision. I had confidence in my aim. As expected, you could stomach it without a problem. I'll take that into consideration from now on.」

「… My scalp was shaved a bit… maybe…」

「Well, that much will regenerate, right? No problems then.」
「Uu～」

Yue began hitting Hajime's stomach with a face that said, 「That might be true, but even so!」

She certainly did tell him to shoot, and she was prepared for it, but Yue was a woman. She had her own dreams, and she hoped he would have at least hesitated a little. She wanted to complain about his light response.

Hajime did not worry for Yue once he found she would likely be unable to use Advance Rank magic while manipulated. There were few spells which could overcome her immortality.

For him, it was unpleasant to shoot without hesitation, especially since it was a taboo to hesitate in combat. He tilted his head wondering what she was dissatisfied with. Seeing him like this, Yue

simply turned away and pouted.

Hajime sighed inwardly, thinking about how he would be able to fix her mood. It would surely be harder than defeating the alraune.

There was no question that the alraune was dead, but Yue was still hurt.

After that, she sucked Hajime's blood until he fainted. After successfully restoring her mood, they continued their journey.

Eventually, they descended 100 floors from where Hajime first started.

Hajime checked his equipment and supplies every time they descended, and, as always, Yue stared at him when he started working. Rather than his work, she simply wanted to watch Hajime. Even now, she was to his right, relaxing as he worked. Her expression did not suit the atmosphere of the atmosphere.

They did not know how many days had passed since they met since they had no sense of time, and, recently, Yue had a more comfortable expression; she was even acting spoiled at times.

When they rested at base, she would remain glued to him. If he lay down, she would cling to his arm as they slept. Yue would embrace him from behind when he sat down. When she fed on his blood, she would cuddle with him from the front. She would stay even after

she finished feeding as well. With a content expression, she rubbed her face against his chest.

Hajime was a man.

Yue, despite her 12 year old appearance should not have evoked lust; however, she was much older than her appearance and had a unique charm. She was bewitching at a glance; it was troublesome. Still, they were in the Labyrinth, and the tension helped him bear with it. However, he was not confident he would be able to resist her when they reached the surface when she was acting the adult. In fact, there may not have been any meaning to do so…

「Hajime… More careful as usual… 」

「Hm? Ahh, because it's Floor 100 next. I thought there might be something there. The upper Labyrinth is thought to have 100 floors… so just in case. 」

When Hajime passed Floor 80 here, he thought there was the possibility that they were no longer in the 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】he was in originally. He had the same feeling when he fell into the Abyss, as well. Judging from how he felt as he traveled each level, he was likely far from the other Labyrinth.

Firearms, martial arts, unique magic, weaponry, and transmutation. After polishing everything, Hajime had confidence in himself. He would not be taken down so easily. However, this place was frightening enough to kill him, even with his abilities.

For that reason, Hajime prepared as much as possible, Currently, his Status Plate looked like this.

= = = =

Comprehension

= = = =

After progressing 200 meters, they found a dead end. No, rather than a dead end, it was a huge door. The double door was 10 meters tall and had beautiful sculptures engraved on them.

There were many heptagonal patterns. 「… This is amazing. Could it be…」

「… Abode of the Traitors?」

He had a feeling this room was where the final boss lay in wait. Hajime's instinct sent him warnings, despite no reaction appearing from his Perception skills. Up ahead was danger. Yue felt it, too, because there was sweat on her forehead.

「Ha, not bad at all. We finally reached our goal, huh?」 Hajime ignored his instincts and wore his bold smile. He had no

choice but to move forward, no matter what was behind the door.

「… Mm!」

Yue stared at the door with an expression which showed she was prepared.

The two walked past the final pillars and advanced to the doors.

At that moment, a huge magic formation, 30 meters wide, appeared

between them and the doors. Crimson light poured out, pulsating.

Hajime recognized the magic. He could not forget it. It was the magic which triggered the day he fell into the Abyss. The formation for the behemoth was only 10 meters in diameter, though. The one before him was three times the size, and it was far more complex and detailed.

「Hey now, what's with this size? Is it really the last boss?」「… It's fine… We won't lose…」

As expected, Hajime smiled. Yue grasped his arm tightly with a determined expression. Hajime nodded and glared at the magic formation. They would not be able to advance without defeating the monster it summoned.

The formation shined more until it finally burst. Hajime and Yue held their arms up to keep from being blinded. When the light disappeared…

A monster 30 meters in length with six heads and long necks, sharp fangs, and crimson eyes appeared, comparable to the

Hydra of myth.

「「「「「「Kuraaaann!!」」」」」」

The six pairs of eyes stared at Hajime and Yue as the creature gave off a strange cry. It wanted to bring judgment to the intruders who did not know their place. A fierce thirst for blood, which would

normally stop a man's heart, was flung at the two.

One of the heads with a red crest opened its mouth, emitting flames. The flames were like a massive wall bearing down on them.

Hajime and Yue jumped to the left and right to begin their counterattack. Hajime fired Donner at the red head, blowing its head up.

Hajime pumped his fist having his first victory when a head with a white pattern screamed. White light covered the first head and completely restored it, as if time had been reversed. It seems that head was able to use Recovery Magic.

Yue launched an ice shard at the green head, blowing it away; however, the results were the same when the white head cast its spell.

Hajime clicked his tongue communicated with Yue via "Telepathy."
『Yue! We're going after the white head! It'll be endless

otherwise!』 『Yeah!』

The blue head shot out chunks of ice from its mouth. Hajime and Yue aimed at the white head while avoiding the shot.

Dopan!

「“Scarlet Spear!”」

A flash of light and a blazing spear shot toward the white head; however, when it was about to hit, the yellow head entered the line of fire and expanded. The head shined yellow and took both attacks head on. Only, the yellow head remained, uninjured, as it glared at them.

「Tch! A shield. Attack, defense, and healing, isn’t this some good balance!」

Hajime threw an “Incendiary Grenade” over the creature as he fired Donner at the white head with full power. Yue helped as well, firing “Scarlet Spear” in rapid succession. Her “Azure Sky” may have surpassed the yellow head and hit the white head, but she would run out of energy and be easy prey. If she drank blood, she could recover quickly, but it was unlikely she would get the chance. Unless the number of heads could be halved, she would be unable to use magic of the Supreme Rank.

The yellow head took all their attacks, but it soon showed signs of damage.

「Kuraan!」

The white head healed the yellow head immediately.

It was playing its role perfectly. However, at that moment, the “Incendiary Grenade” exploded overhead. The tar, 3000 C in temperature, rained down on it. The creature screamed in pain.

「Don’t miss this chance!」Hajime cried in his Telepathy. They

planned for a simultaneous attack. However, before they could execute it, Yue screamed.

「Nooo!!!」「!? Yue!」

He quickly rushed over to her, only to be intercepted by wind blades and fireballs shot by the green and red heads. Yue was still screaming. Hajime wondered what was going on as he clenched his teeth. The black head had been doing nothing this entire time.

(No, it was doing something from the start!)

Hajime fired Donner at the black head while dodging with “Air Walk” and “Ground Contraction.” With the sound of his firearm, the black head, which had been staring at Yue, was blown away. Yue collapsed at this time. He could see she was pale, even from a distance. The blue head opened its maw and stretched its head toward Yue, trying to swallow her.

「Like hell I’d let you!!」

Hajime prepared himself to be injured by the storm of wind blades and fireballs as he used “Ground Contraction.”

He avoided a potentially fatal attack with Donner and “Wind Claw.” At the last moment, Hajime arrived between the blue head and Yue, but he had no time to counter, left with only the option of relying on “Strength of Gold.” Hajime could not use this skill while mobile, though, so he stood before Yue to block the attack. His magic covered his body the moment the creature bit him.

「Kurururu!」「Guu!」

While growling, the blue head swallowed Hajime whole. When it tried to close its jaws, Hajime leaned forward and braced his legs so it could not close down on him. He pushed Donner against its upper jaw and pulled the trigger.

The blue head exploded from the blast, its brains splattering in every direction. Hajime used “Strong Leg” on the motionless head and threw a Flash and Sonic Grenade at the Hydra.

He had developed his “Sonic Grenade” from a demon which could emit ultrasonic waves on Floor 80. The demon had a special organ inside its body which generated sound attacks. Hajime did not get any unique magic from defeating the monster, but he was able to use its special organ as material for his new weapon.

The two grenades bathed the Hydra in intense light and ultrasonic waves. Hajime used this chance to carry Yue and hide behind a pillar.

「Hey! Yue! Get a grip!」「…」

She did not react to his words and remained trembling. He cursed and slapped her cheeks. He called out for her telepathically and gave her Holy Water. After a while, light returned to her

eyes. 「Yue!」

「… Hajime?」

「Yeah, it's Hajime-san. You okay? What happened?」

Yue confirmed his existence as she blinked. She extended her small hands and touched his face, sighing in relief as tears appeared in her eyes.

「… Thank god… I thought you abandoned me… in that darkness…」

「Huh? What are you talking about?」

Hajime was confused by her state. Yue had seen an image of Hajime resealing her and abandoning her. Seeing that, a strong sense of insecurity assaulted her. She was bound by fear, her body and mind paralyzed.

「Tch! A bad status magic? Seems like the black head will induce panic. Shit, that monster really does have some good balance.」

「… Hajime.」

Yue watched Hajime curse toward the troublesome enemy with her anxious eyes. It was a frightening scene, being abandoned by him.

He had risked his life after unsealing from her 300 years of imprisonment. He did not treat her differently, even when he knew she was a vampire, and he had even allowed her to feed on him on a daily basis. It was unavoidable that her heart yielded.

The only place for Yue was by his side. It was nice that they had

promised to return to his home together. She did not want to be alone again. The nightmare struck her, eating her from the inside.

Hajime stood up when he noticed the Hydra recover from its confusion. Yue grabbed his clothes, detaining him involuntarily.

「… I…」

She was shaking anxiously, close to crying. Hajime understood what she was thinking. As usual, he could read her. Either way, he had promised to take her to Japan. He had no reason to feign ignorance here.

He would be able to comfort her with words, but there was no time for that. If he said anything in a half-hearted manner, she would fall prey to the creature's magic. There was also the possibility that he would make a mistake. While he thought of an excuse, he scratched his head and squatted down, meeting her gaze.

Then…

「? … !?」

He tilted his head and kissed Yue.

Their lips touched only a bit, but she reacted dramatically. She stared at him.

He looked away bashfully and led her to a stand with his hand.
「We'll kill that monster and survive. We'll go to the surface and

go home… together.」

Yue stared at Hajime in amazement. Her typical expressionless

face broke into a gentle, beautiful smile. 「Yes!」

Hajime cleared his throat to collect his thoughts and informed Yue of the strategy.

「Yue, I'll be using Schlagen. I can't fire continuously, so cover me.」

「… Leave it to me!」

Yue was full of motivation. Her quiet murmurs were gone, replaced by a voice full of ambition. All anxiety from before had vanished. There had been a breakthrough in a number of ways. Hajime recalled his usual lack of independence, thinking he may have acted rashly when he looked to the future.

However, at that time, the Hydra created an explosion and roared, as if saying 「Die, Riajuu!」 pelleting the two with fireballs, wind blades, and ice shards. The two jumped from the shadow of the pillar and began their counterattack.

「"Scarlet Spear!" "Imperial Cannon!" "Frozen Rain!"」

She rapidly activated her magic, power built up at an impossible speed as a tornado of ice, spiraling spears of fire, and numerous vacuum blades danced toward the Hydra.

She aimed for the gap after they attacked, launching her magic at the red, green, and blue heads respectively. The yellow head was forced to act, but it could not move as it saw Hajime aiming at the white head.

「Kuraaan!」

A nearby pillar transformed into an impromptu shield; it was able to use a skill similar to the scorpion's, though the scale was much smaller.

Yue's magic hit the stone walls, blasting through them all and hit

the three heads.

「「「Guruuuu!!!」」」

The three heads screamed in agony. When the black head stared at Yue, it began using its own magic.

Yue grew anxious again; however, she remembered her kiss with Hajime, which blew all her unease away. The passionate feeling swept through her body.

「… It won't work anymore!」

In order to cover Hajime, Yue had been casting spells in rapid succession and was emphasizing quantity over quality.

The red head received healing from the white head while the blue and green heads attacked. Yue tried to counter them on her own.

While the three heads were occupied with Yue, Hajime approached

the demon in an instant, going for a single killing blow, especially since it would be troublesome if it still had a powerful attack to use.

When the black head realized its magic did not work on Yue, it looked for Hajime. The pain, hunger, and anxiety of when he first fell into the Abyss came to his mind.

But…

「What about it!」

It was a past he endured long ago. What he felt back then was no longer a big deal. Hajime blew the black head away with Donner.

The white head tried to heal it the next instant, but Hajime jumped into the air with “Air Walk” and “Ground Contraction,” aiming Schlagen before it could do anything.

As he had assumed, the yellow head stood in his way. 「Break together!」

Hajime used “Lightning Clad” to fire Schlagen, releasing a crimson spark. The full-metal jacket bullet, made of Taur Ore coated in the scorpion’s Stall Ore, was released. The Stall Ore especially had a high affinity to magic and was suited to use with “Lightning Clad.” All the powderized Combustion Stone was ignited with the spark.

Dogan!!

The red bullet, electromagnetically accelerated through the 1.5 meter barrel emitted an explosive sound. The gun was ten times more powerful than Donner at its maximum output, and, based on his rudimentary calculations, it was one-hundred times more powerful than a typical rifle. It was a monstrous weapon that was not possible without this world's special ore and magic.

When he fired it, the bullet made a red trail like a thick laser. This weapon made Kouki's most powerful spell, which he launched at the behemoth before, look like child's play. The yellow head met the bullet directly as it burned through the hair.

Though the yellow head had a defense similar to "Strength of Gold," the bullet reached the white head as if there was nothing to impede it in the first place. The bullet penetrated through everything, including the wall to the rear. The entire floor vibrated, as if struck by an earthquake.

What remained were two necks with open wounds cauterized by heat, the bullet piercing even into the wall. Yue stared at Hajime in amazement, forgetting the enemy before her.

The creature did not think almost half its firepower could be extinguished in a single moment.Hajime landed flat on the ground, smoke rising from Schlagen as the round was ejected. When the shell hit the floor, the three remaining heads regained their senses and glared at Hajime. Still, their previous opponent was not someone they could ignore.

「"Scorching Heavens!"」

This golden magic belonged to the one once known as the Blood Sucking Princess, an existence which brought fear to even her own people due to her talents. This had led them to seal her. The power she poured into her spell surrounded the creature, as if the heavens

themselves were judging it.

Six orbs of lightning surrounded the three heads, then each globe discharged, uniting in the center.

It was a sun made of thunder, created by the gods themselves. This thunderous sun was released immediately afterward. Zugagagagagagagagaga!!

When the globe burst, it rained spears of lightning within the bounds of the smaller spheres. The three heads tried to escape but could not. As the wrath of God poured down from the sky, flashes of thunder filled the room.

Helpless, the three heads screamed in agony and turned to charcoal, erased by the Supreme Rank magic which lasted more than 10 seconds.

As always, Yue collapsed after the use of such a strong spell. She breathed heavily from her magic exhaustion, and her expressionless face conveyed her satisfaction. She gave Hajime a thumbs up, and Hajime returned the gesture. He began walking as he carried his rifle on his shoulder. He left the Hydra's remains behind him as he walked to Yue.

Then,

「Hajime!」

Yue desperately called out to him. He followed her line of sight to

see a seventh head appear, glaring at him. Hajime turned stiff.

The seventh, silver head, shifted its gaze to Yue and released an aurora without any sign of preparation. Like Schlagen, the aurora shot toward Yue in an instant, and she could not move due to her magic exhaustion.

The moment the silver head turned to her, Hajime had jumped forward, his body assaulted by chills.

Just like with the blue head before, Hajime was able to jump into the line of fire to save her.

This time, however, the results were different. The aurora swallowed Hajime hole and blew Yue away from the after shock.

The aurora settled, and Yue sat up, her body racked in pain. She looked for Hajime who had been swallowed by the attack.

He had not moved from where he blocked the attack. Smoke rose from his body, and Schlagen lay on the floor, melted.

「H, Hajime?」「…」

He did not answer. His body shook and he fell forward.
「Hajime!」

Yue quickly rushed over to him, ignoring her aching body as she was driven by unease. Because of her magic exhaustion, she fell, unable to gather strength. With her impatience, she took out the Holy Water and drank it. Her vitality returned slowly as she rushed to Hajime.

Blood had puddled beneath his stomach. The attack had penetrated through “Strength of Gold” and damaged him severely. If he had not used Schlagen as a shield, he likely would have died. Luckily, Schlagen was a weapon made from the scorpion shell which endured even Yue’s “Azure Sky.”

When she turned him on his back, she saw him in a severe state. His fingers, shoulder, and flank were burning, festering, and the bone was exposed in some places. The right side of his face was burned, and his right eye was bleeding. It was a blessing that his legs remained mostly intact.

Yue tried to give him Holy Water, but the hydra would not allow that. It began shooting balls of light, 10 centimeters in diameter, its intensity similar to a gatling gun.

She quickly held Hajime and ran with what little strength she had to hide behind a pillar which shaved away with the attack. It would not even last a minute. Each ball of light was packed with terrifying energy.

Yue quickly dropped the Holy Water into Hajime’s wounds and tried to get him to drink another. However, he did not have the power to swallow it, spitting it out after choking. She forced him to drink it mouth to mouth.

Even so, the Holy Water was unable to restore his wounds. Usually restoration would begin immediately, but something was inhibiting it.

「Why!?」

Yue took out all the Holy Water she had on hand in a panic. The hydra's poison mixed in the aurora was what inhibited the

healing effect; the poison melted his flesh. Normally, he would melt without resistance.

But the Holy Water was slightly more effective, allowing him to heal, albeit slowly. Still, his right eye had evaporated in the light. He would be unable to regenerate it.

The pillar would be crushed soon, and Hajime would not be able to move for some time. Yue stared at him with determination and kissed him. Holding Donner, she stood up.

「… This time, I'll save you…」

With words of determination, she jumped out from behind the pillar.

She only had a little magic left, and the Holy Water she had was used up. Without blood, she could not rely on her body strengthening. All she had was Donner and her unreliable "Automatic Regeneration."

The silver head glared at her. Since her magic reserves were low, she did not choose to fight with magic. Instead, she chose to run and dodge, since she could not fire Donner like Hajime could. Originally, Yue was not good with close combat, so she was quickly driven into a corner.

Finally, one of the balls hit Yue in the shoulder. 「Agu!?」

She groaned in pain, retaining her momentum as she continued running. The moment she stopped from pain would be the moment she collapsed.

Her “Automatic Regeneration” was active, but slower than usual. The poison was effective, even against her innate ability. Even now, the magic enforcing her body would disappear.

Yue tried to approach, but the density of the barrage prevented her from moving forward. She would not be able to shoot Donner without getting closer. She needed a plan to cut the distance, but the attack was merciless, and she was quickly cornered.

In desperation, she pulled the trigger. She used Lightning Magic to substitute for “Lightning Clad.” It was beginner’s luck that the bullet went through the gaps in the attack to hit the silver head’s temple.

However, 「Eh?」

She muttered unintentionally.

The blow should have had some power, even if she lacked the acceleration, but the head did not suffer much damage at all. Despair fell into her expression.

Her defeat would mean Hajime's death, however, so she clenched her teeth and prepared to evade.

Still, she could not continue this forever. The silver head's eyes shined as it released another aurora, jarring the surrounding space. The balls of light limited the means Yue had to evade; even so, she jumped into them, being blown away so she could avoid the aurora.

A light bullet hit her in the abdomen, slamming her into the ground.

「Uu… Uu…」

She could no longer move. If she did not, the barrage of light bullets would hit her. Yue knew this and struggled, but her body would no longer listen.

Her healing was too slow as well. She began crying, unawares; it was mortifying, frustrating that she could not protect Hajime.

After confirming its victory, the silver head roared and shot its bullets of light.

Despite the bullets of light approaching her, Yue did not close her

eyes. She stared at it, showing her heart had not yielded in the least.

Soon, her vision was enveloped in the light. She would die if hit. She wanted to apologize to Hajime for being unable to protect him.

In that instant… a gust of wind blew by her.

「Eh?」

Yue was in someone's arms as the bullets struck the ground beside her. She could not believe her eyes.

Hajime was before her. He was breathing heavily, and one of his eyes was shut, but he was tightly embracing her.

「Don't cry, Yue. It's your win.」「Hajime!」

She embraced him, filled with emotion. Most of his injuries had yet to heal, but he was standing by his willpower.

Hajime gazed at the silver head. It glared back as bullets of light floated in its surroundings. It attacked once; there would be no doubt as to who would escape alive.

「… Slow.」

Hajime did not move until the last moment. He casuallyducked, evading the bullet.

The silver head narrowed its eyes, attacking with its all. 「Hajime, run!」

You cried out desperately, but Hajime was like the wind, blowing about, dancing as he turned around while holding Yue. From the side, one might think the light orbs were avoiding Hajime.

She looked at him with wide eyes. 「Yue, suck my blood.」

His quiet voice and remaining eye urged her. Even under normal circumstances she had some hesitation in sucking his blood. Still, Hajime embraced Yue, exposing his neck while dodging the bullets.

「Your magic is our last resort. Do it, Yue. Win.」 「… Yes!」

His strong words remained in her. She believed in him and buried her fangs into his neck.

Yue's body rapidly healed as Hajime's strength flowed into her. The two danced about, avoiding the light storm while embracing one another.

The world had grown dull to him. In this monochromatic world, everything moved slowly. Only Hajime could move as usual.

He looked. He had seen Yue fight by herself as his wavering consciousness struggled to the surface. She fought desperately with his gun in one hand. When she fell to the ground, the beast tried to finish her off with its aurora.

Fierce anger filled Hajime. What am I doing? How long will I sleep here? Will I allow this place to take my partner? Will I surrender to this beast?

No! Never! Any existence which threatened his, no, their survival was an enemy!, And for that enemy,

「Kill!」

That moment, Hajime felt a spark run through his head, awakening a skill. It was the final derivation of “Divine Step,” [＋Light Speed]. By focusing his cognition, he could increase the efficiency of all skills associated with “Divine Step” dramatically. Hajime had, once again, “Surpassed his limits.”

Hajime arrived next to Yue in an instant and gently dodged the bullets of light.

Eventually, Yue finished sucking his blood, completely regaining her powers.

「Yue, use “Azure Sky” at my signal. Until then, do everything you can to evade.」

「Mm… And you?」

「I'll be making preparations.」

Hajime dropped Yue off behind a pillar and ran toward the hydra. He dodged the incoming barrage of light and shot off Donner

while using "Ground Contraction." The beast was unable to stomach being hit again by the bullet, so it dodged. The bullets made holes in the ceiling.

Hajime continued to change his location, but, even so, the bullets only made holes in the surroundings.

A condescending glint could be seen in the beast's eyes. Yue was uneasy, but she believed in him and waited for his signal to cast her spell.

He jumped up with "Air Walk" and fired Donner. His delicate steps were unrivaled. He jumped in the air near the ceiling, dodging the attack.

Irritated, the silver head shot an aurora carelessly. Naturally, Hajime dodged it with a grin. The creature stiffened upon using its aurora attack. He reloaded Donner and shot at six different places.

「This is for playing with Yue as you pleased. Make sure you take it all.」

With those words, he reloaded the next six bullets once again. An

intense explosion and shock to run through the ceiling. After a

moment of silence, it collapsed. The debris, 10 meters in diameter and weighing many tons fell on the silver head.

「Guraaa!?」

The silver head cried out in surprise and irritation, the timing was perfect. It froze after its attack and could not take evasive action, so it was crushed beneath the rubble.

Hajime opened a hole with Donner and prepared a grenade as he evaded. With his transmutation, he had weakened the ceiling in various places and used his six shots from Donner to cause it to fracture.

His attacks did not end here. If simple debris could defeat the beast, he would not have had such trouble. Hajime approached the trapped hydra with “Ground Contraction” and used Transmute to change the rubble into restraints.

He used some of the surrounding material to make a blast furnace as well, throwing pouches of “Incendiary Grenades” into the

furnace as he shouted. 「Yue!」

「Yes! “Azure Sky!”」

A pale sun appeared in the blast furnace, melting the restrained head. A chain explosion from the “Incendiary Grenades” could be

heard inside; the power broke through the silver head's defenses, dealing it significant damage.

「Guraaaaa!!」

It let loose its death throes. It violently tried to escape, shooting off bullets of light at random. The walls began to break, but Hajime repaired them quickly. The hydra also tried to use its aurora, but the silver head, now melting in the high heat, was unable to release it.

Hajime could no longer sense the hydra. He was convinced of its death this time and collapsed backward.

「Hajime!」

Having lost all her energy, Yue crawled to him. 「Honestly… I'm spent…」

Hajime fell unconscious as he felt Yue embrace him.

Back in time a little bit.

While Hajime and Yue had been locked in mortal combat with the hydra, the Hero Party had temporarily aborted their journey through the Labyrinth and returned to Hairihi Kingdom.

They were searching the floors without any mapping having been done, and the sudden surge in strength of the demons gave them an intense fatigue, so they needed rest, so t h ey returned to the Palace. If nothing else, they had also received a communication that the Helsha Empire wished to speak to those of the Hero Party.

「Why now?」Kouki and his party thought naturally.

When they were summoned, little time had passed since Eht's "Oracle" had been released. Furthermore, the Empire was a country of mercenaries which was completely dependent on individual ability, something of a "Holy Land" for adventurers and mercenaries.

For them, talk of a group of heroes suddenly appearing and leading humanity was unconvincing. The Saint Church was also present in the Helsha Empire, so it had some believers, but they were far less devout than those in Hairihi Kingdom. Most of its people were either mercenaries or involved in business, so there were more who valued profit over faith. If anything, the rumors were simply a story; it would hardly make them earnest believers.

Based on that, it was possible they had made light of meeting with Kouki and the others after their summoning. Of course, they would not be openly obnoxious toward God before the Saint Church. While Hairihi Kingdom would have been more than happy to join such a meeting, the Empire – in particular, the Emperor – was not interested and remained uninvolved.

However, the fact that their raid on 【Orcus Great Labyrinth 】had succeeded in breaking through Floor 65, beating the old record, piqued the Empire's interest. As such, they sent word, hoping to meet with the Hero. Both the Saint Church and Hairihi Kingdom were quick to agree.

While this news was meticulously related to Kouki and the others on the carriage, they arrived at the Palace.

The carriage entered the Palace. They saw a boy approach when they descended. He was around 10 and had blonde hair and blue eyes. His atmosphere was similar to Kouki's, though he was clearly more mischievous. It was Randell S. B. Hairihi, the prince of the Kingdom.

His Highness Randell was like a dog flopping its ears and wagging its tail as he called out to them loudly.

「Kaori! You made it back! I've been waiting for you!」

Of course, Kaori was not the only one present, since everyone had come. To them, it was easy to imagine his feelings just by looking at him – apart from Kaori, he saw no one else.

In fact, Prince Randell had made aggressive approaches toward her since the day they were summoned. With that said, he was only 10. In her view, he was only an emotionally attached child, and there were no signs that she had feelings beyond that. For someone as innately kind as her, he was like a cute young brother.

「It's been a while, Your Highness Randell.」

His imaginary tail wagged furiously seeing her smile as he turned red. Despite that, he managed to put on a masculine face as he made yet another "Approach" toward Kaori.

「Yes, it's been a long time indeed. When you said you were going to the Labyrinth, I thought I had died. Were you hurt? If I was stronger, I would never let you do such a thing…」

Randell bit his lip in vexation. Though Kaori refused to be protected, his heartwarming feelings made her soften.

「Thank you for your concern, but I'm all right, okay? I want to do this.」

「No, Kaori, you aren't suited for fighting. Th, there should be safer things you can do.」

「Safer things?」

Kaori tilted her head hearing his words as he turned an even deeper shade of red. Observing this amusing change from the side, Shizuku could only smile wryly as she thought about the young man's valiant approach.

「R, right. For example, how about being a maid? You can work for me starting today.」

「A maid? Sorry, but I'm a Healer…」

「Th, then it's fine if you go to the Medical Institute. There's no need to go to dangerous places like the Labyrinth or the front lines, right?」

The Medical Institute was a state-run hospital situated right next to the Royal Palace. In short, Randell did not want to be apart from Kaori. However, the feelings of this young boy would not move Kaori's obstinate nature.

「No, I won't be able to heal them immediately if I'm not on the front. Thank you for worrying about me.」

「Uu…」

Randell groaned softly, realizing he could not budge Kaori's determination.

「Prince Randell, Kaori is my precious childhood friend. As long as I am around, I will continue to protect her.」

From Kouki's point of view, he was comforting the younger boy, but those words were completely wrong for this moment. In the eyes of this love struck Randell, he felt Kouki's had a different meaning.

"I won't let my woman leave my side. I won't hand Kaori over to anyone!"

He imagined the Hero and the Healer snuggling together intimately.

Randell's expression twisted in annoyance as he glared at Kouki, as if saying, "You're my mortal enemy!" To Randell, the two looked like lovers.

「What are you saying? You think nothing of sending Kaori into dangerous places? I won't lose to you! Kaori is better off with me!」

「Um…」

Hearing Randell's hostile words, Kaori was at a loss for words and simply smiled weakly while Kouki was simply speechless. Shizuku, seeing Kouki like this, could only sigh.

Before Kouki could say anything more to aggravate the angered Prince, a calm, authoritative voice called out.

「Randell, behave yourself. Can't you see you're troubling Kaori?」
「S, Sister! B… but…」

「No buts. Even though everyone is tired, you are detaining them here… Who is it that is not thinking about others?」

「Uu… B, but…」 「Randell?」

「I, I just remembered, I have an errand to take care of! Excuse me!」

Refusing to admit his wrongdoing, Randell turned around and fled. Seeing his back fade from view, Princess Liliana sighed and spoke.

「Kaori, Kouki-san, I am sorry for my brother's behavior. I will apologize on his behalf.」

Liliana lowered her head as she said this, causing her beautiful, straight blonde hair to flow downward.

「No, don't worry about it, Lily. Prince Randell was just concerned.」

「Right. I'm not sure why he got angry… I don't think I said anything rude that I should apologize for.」

Kaori and Kouki responded while Liliana smiled thinly. Because she understood, as his elder sister, her younger brother's love interest, she sympathized somewhat with Prince Randell whom Kaori was not conscious of. All the more because Prince Randell independently thought he had a mortal enemy.

As an aside, the meetings between Randell and his enemy would cause a big stir… but that is a separate issue.

Liliana was a talented girl of 14 years. She had gold hair and blue eyes; she was both beautiful and popular amongst the populace. She was earnest without being obstinate, and she was good at reading the mood; she could interact openly with the servants as well.

She, as both a princess and a person, had been quiet anxious about how Kouki and the other summoned students were doing. She had a sense of guilt for dragging them into the problems of her world which was none of their concern.

For that reason, she took the initiative to get to know them better, and it was not long until they became well acquainted. She got along especially well with Shizuku and Kaori who were around the same age. By this point, they had dropped all honorifics and elected to speak casually with one another by their nicknames.

「No, Kouki-san. There is no need to worry about Randell. He was just being a bit reckless. More importantly… welcome back,

everyone. I am glad you have all returned safely.」

Saying this, Liliana smiled gently. Even the classmates who stood close to beauties like Kaori and Shizuku blushed. There was a refined elegance in her that the two lacked; it was something most young women would be unable to compete with using beauty alone.

In fact, Nagayama's group and the delinquents were also red from having their hearts stolen. Some of the girls were blushing as well. For ordinary modern day students, the aura of an otherworldly princess was too much. Those who could bear it, like Kaori, and those that had become close to the princess were abnormal in this regard.

「Thank you, Lily. Your smile has blown my fatigue away. I'm glad to see you again as well.」

Kouki said his words with a refreshing smile. Though he had said it often, Kouki did not have an ulterior motive in saying this. He was simply happy to be alive as well as happy with meeting a friend once again; he just happened to be unaware of the effects his words and actions had.

「R, really? Um…」

As a Princess, Liliana was used to compliments and flattery; so she had trained herself to become adept at reading past the mask of others and discerning their true intent. For that reason, she could see no flattery in Kouki's words. Unused to such experiences outside her family, Liliana's cheeks went red and she had difficulty responding.

Kouki, as usual, continued smiling, not realizing the effects of his behavior. As expected, Shizuku could only sigh deeply. A worrisome person had taken the stage here, and the person himself was unaware of it.

「An, anyway, thank you all for your hard work. Preparations for a meal and a bath have been completed, so make yourselves at home. The Imperial envoys will take a few days to arrive, so you have no need to worry about them for now.」

Having recovered herself, Liliana urged them on.

While Kouki and the rest of the class were busy relieving the fatigue accumulated in the Labyrinth, the group which stayed behind heard of the behemoth's defeat, crying out jubilantly. After this, the number of people who returned from the front line increased. Another topic of conversation was Aiko-sensei, who had received the title of "Goddess of Fertility," which caused her to cringe quite a bit. Kouki and the others rested their bodies, exhausted from their journey. Inwardly, however, Kaori was restless. She wanted to return to the Labyrinth.

The envoys of the Empire arrived 3 days later.

Currently, Kouki and the members diving into the Labyrinth, the leaders of the Kingdom, and a delegation of priests led by Ishtar were present in full force to receive the five envoys, standing in the middle of the red carpet opposite King Elhid.

「It is a pleasure to see you here. We hope to show you the valor of our Heroes.」

「Thank you for inviting us despite the sudden request for an audience, Your Majesty. With that said… may we know the identity of the Hero?」

「Hmm. Allow me to introduce him first. Kouki-dono, would you

please step forward?」「Yes.」

Kouki and the others were revealed afterward. Despite the fact that not even 2 months had passed, they looked fearless, unlike when they were first summoned.

They had changed significantly while out. The palace maids, noble ladies, and various Kouki fans in the group which stayed behind would, without a doubt, go red in the face and sigh in fascination. Those who had made advances on Kouki had already gone into the double digits… but due to his extreme denseness, their approaches were simply greetings of “friendly people.” A naturally dense hero was walking the earth.

「Hoo, so you’re the Hero. Quite young, I must say. Pardon my rudeness, but did you truly break through Lfloor 65? If memory serves, a monster known as the behemoth appears there…」

While scrutinizing Kouki, the messenger looked at Ishtar in an open manner, casting a suspicious gaze upon him. One of the envoy’s bodyguards also looked at Kouki in an appraising manner.

Unsettled by their gazes, Kouki answered them.

「May I speak? Ah, as to prove whether or not we defeated it…

ah, would you like to see a map of the 65th floor?」

Kouki proposed a variety of means of proof, but the envoy simply shook his head and smiled.

「No thank you. There is a quicker method than that. Would you have a mock battle with one of my guards? It would allow me to see your strength immediately.」

「Well, I don't mind, but…」

Kouki looked back at King Elhid, slightly puzzled. Having caught that, the King looked to Ishtar for approval, who nodded. With Eht's authority behind him, it was an easy matter to convince the Empire to accept Kouki as humanity's leader, but a real battle was the quickest means to make the meritocratic Empire recognize him.

「Very well, Kouki-dono. Please show them your strength.」

「It's decided, then. Well, we'll be imposing upon you to prepare a location.」

And so, a mock battle between the Hero and the envoy's bodyguard was abruptly decided.

Kouki's opponent could not have been beyond an ordinary person. He was neither tall nor short, and he lacked any notable features. He could easily be lost in a crowd. At first glance, there was nothing strong about him.

He held his large, edgeless sword downward in a casual manner, it was a stance that may as well not have been one at all.

Kouki was slightly angered by this. He wanted to show his spirit in the first blow to make the man devote himself seriously to the battle.

「Here I come!」

Kouki came in like the wind. He utilized his high speed to close the distance between them as he swung his wooden sword down.

An ordinary fighter would have had trouble even perceiving it. Of course, Kouki intended to stop before hitting.

There was no point worrying about it. Rather, Kouki was going to

experience a completely unexpected outcome. 「Ah!?」

Kouki shouted as he had been thrown back.

The bodyguard readied his sword after his swing and glared at Kouki. In the instant Kouki stopped, he had already begun his attack, knocking Kouki's sword upward, forcing him back.

The guard straightened his pose while Kouki slid back, looking at him in astonishment. Having relaxed his stance while forcing his

attack to stop, Kouki could barely register the guard's attack.

The guard once again set up his sword in a natural pose. His movements were natural, without any sense of urgency to them, making it difficult to react.

「… Hey, Hero. Do you even have any intent to fight in this world?」

The guard was physically and mentally focused on Kouki, glaring condescendingly toward him as he spoke with an insolent attitude. Kouki responded with a halted tone.

「Eh? Um, yes. I was originally just a student, though.」「… You're "God's Apostle" now.」

The guard looked at Ishtar and those of the Saint Church for a moment and snorted in displeasure. He then walked naturally toward Kouki, closing the distance.

「Take your stance, Hero. If you let me get any closer…」 There was no need to say anymore. A strong urge to kill. Alarms

ran through Kouki on instinct as he quickly held up the Holy

Sword. 「Uu!?」

Gaaan! A loud ringing accompanied a large spark. The man stood above as Kouki caught the boorish sword while kneeling down.
「When did he get this close!?」 Kouki thought in astonishment as the man looked down at his eyes from close in. A dense blood lust ran through Kouki's body.

「Ah, ahhhhh!!!」

Kouki unconsciously screamed as a violent torrent of magic erupted from his body.

The guard was overwhelmed and lost his posture. Kouki took the chance to swing the Holy Sword. However, his movements were clearly duller as he was about to hit his opponent. He had no intent of truly cutting the man, it was more of a subconscious action. The guard's eyes narrowed. And,

「I'm done here.」

He easily recovered his posture and calmed down. He easily exchanged swords with Kouki's greatest strength and had already taken distance. Rather, he had already sheathed his sword.

「Eh? Eh?」

Naturally, Kouki was confused as t he guard looked at him coldly.
「Hey, do you even understand what it is you're fighting against or

even why?」

「Um, that's demons and devils… because they hurt people.」
「"Demons and devils," huh… Can you do anything with such a

cowardly sword? I can't imagine you fighting, let alone leading us. Don't be swindled by such a fantastic story.」

While the guard criticized Kouki indifferently as if it were all fact, he did not hold back. Rather, he was egging Kouki on.

「Fantastic story… isn't that a bit rude? I'm being serious!」「And injuries, what can a little brat who fears getting hurt do?

There's no blood lust in your sword. Tell me how "serious" you are after you reach me.」

「I'm not afraid,」Kouki wanted to say, but the guard turned around faster.

Not only did he act arrogantly before the Hero, he had declared the end of the battle in a one-sided manner. Those of the Kingdom and Saint Church grew noisy. Kouki was going to protest… but before that, an old man's voice reached the guard.

「Mm, the Hero is still developing. This is an issue of not having enough experience. There is no need to form a hasty conclusion. For now, we will accept your concerns about the Hero. Have faith in me as the Pope of the Saint Church. You understand what it is I am saying, Emperor Gahard?」

「… Tch, so you did find me out. You're as difficult to trick as ever, old man.」

The guard's curse reached the people around him. He took off an earring on his right ear. The air around him turned white like fog, and when it cleared up, someone completely different appeared.

He was a wild man in his 40s. He had sharp blue eyes and silver hair cut short, reminiscent of a wolf, and his body was covered in muscles which had been strengthened to their limit, clearly visible even through his clothes. The surroundings grew clamorous once again upon seeing him.

「G, Gahard-dono!?」「The Emperor!?」

Ineed, this man who concealed himself was Emperor of the Helsha Empire, Gahard D. Helsha. King Elhid massaged his temple seeing this.

「What are you thinking, Emperor Gahard?」

「Now, now, King Elhid. I apologize for not introducing myself. However, a little play-fighting is the quickest way for me to make sure. This is of great importance in our future battles, so please excuse my rudeness.」

Though Gahard excused himself in this way, he was hardly apologetic. Elhid sighed and said,「No matter.」Kouki was completely stunned. It seemed the Emperor was a flighty individual, and his "Surprises" were the norm.

「Ishtar-dono. Of course I will put faith in your words, but take my remarks as advice for this hero who seems to be a danger. I apologize for the rude words and making light of God's Apostle.」

Gahard apologized to Ishtar with a tone which had something cold within; Ishtar remained impassive and nodded in response, saying 「I understand.」

Afterward, to disperse the tense atmosphere, there was a formal ceremony in which the Empire accepted the Hero, though the man's tone itself was mechanical. For the time being, he had achieved his purpose for this visit.

In a room in the Palace, Gahard snorted as he responded to a subordinate's question regarding his true thoughts.

「He's no good. He's just a kid. He unhesitatingly believes in ideals and justice. He's thoughtless but has good charisma, it's a bad combination. He's the type to kill those around him with his ideals.」

「Certainly. And he seems to talk of devils as being the same as demons. It would not be an issue if this were intentional, but…」

「Well, I doubt it is, probably unconscious. I guess it's "good that he's ignorant" in a certain sense, and it seems he's lived his life that way. Is he like this in his world, or is this due to his abilities here? Either way, a change needs to happen in that troublesome guy. I can't ignore him as an "Apostle of God." For now, don't spread any information.」

Apparently the Hero Kouki failed in the Emperor's evaluation. However, because he was simply a student several months ago, and considering his current ability, Gahard could not come to a solid conclusion and simply shrugged his shoulders.

「Well, the war with Devils might pick up in pace soon. We'll see how he is then. For now, let's prioritize keeping ourselves from being involved with that kid… and watch out for the Pope.」

「As you wish.」

He had no intention of revealing his true thoughts. The next day, Kouki and the others saw him off as he returned to his country. With his business finished, he had no reason to stay any longer. As expected of the flighty Emperor.

Ajs an aside, the Emperor saw Shizuku training early in the morning and, liking t his, invited her fairly seriously to become a mistress. Shizuku politely refused, and he laughed boldly saying, 「Well, I'm in no rush.」 At that time, Kouki felt he could never get along well with this man and was in a poor mood for a while.

Needless to say, Shizuku's concerns only grew.

Last Chapter

Hajime felt his entire body wrapped in something warm and soft. It was a nostalgic feeling. It was the feeling of a bed with a cushion that gently cradled his head and back. The softness of feathers wrapped his body. His dozing consciousness was thrown into confusion.

(What is this? This is supposed to be the Labyrinth… so why is there a bed…)

He fumbled about as his mind was not fully awake. However, he could not move his right hand. It was wrapped in a soft feeling, different from the bed. His palm was also wedged between something warm and soft.

(What is this?)

Hajime moved his hand while still unable to think. He felt a certain elasticity between his hands which was soft to the touch. It could be a habit to keep touching it…

「… An…」 (!?)

For some reason, he heard a seductive gasp. At that moment, his mind began returning to him. Hajime sat up in a panic as he realized he really was in a bed. The bed had pure white sheets and a canopy.

It was on the stone pavement in a terrace atrium. A refreshing breeze blew by his cheek. He was surrounded by the thin curtains and the columns holding the canopy up. It was like a bed in the midst of the Parthenon. The entire space was filled with a warm light he had not seen in a long time.

He was confused. Just a while ago, he was in a desperate struggle fighting against the hydra in the darkness of the Labyrinth.

(Where am I? This place… don't tell me it's the afterlife or something…)

In this solemn place, an ominous thought crossed his mind. Hajime's thoughts were interrupted by an amorous voice next to him.

「… Hnn… Hajime… Auu…」

「!? 」

While confused, Hajime turned over the sheet. Without a single thread of clothing, Yue clung to his right hand. He noticed that he, too, was naked.

「I see… So this is the cut to morning scene… no, wait!」

The confused Hajime retorted to himself for his idiotic thoughts. Yue began waking up.

「Yue, wake up, Yue.」

「Nn～」

When he tried to wake her up, she curled up and shook her head. His right hand lay between her thighs, and it was now approaching a dangerous place.

「Guu… So this is the afterlife… Is this Heaven?」

Hajime said such stupid things as he tried to free his right hand; however, every time…

「Nn～ Nn..」

Yue panted seductively.

「Guu, calm down. No matter how old she is, she still looks like a child. I can't get excited! I'm definitely not into little girls!」 Hajime did his best to persuade himself, though his expression was clearly approaching the level of a pervert. He gave up trying to free his right hand and instead tried to wake up the

cause to no avail.

Gradually, his irritation grew. Hajime could not process the situation in his confusion, and a vein appeared on his forehead seeing her sleep in such a leisurely manner.

His irritation culminated…

「That's enough, now get up! You naturally erotic Vampire Princess!」

He invoked "Lightning Clad," discharging it through his right hand.

「!? A ba ba ba ba ba ba ba a ba ba ba」

Bikun bikun, Yue was shocked. She released his arm and opened her eyes while twitching.

「… Hajime?」

「Yeah, it's Hajime-san. Time to wake up, sleepy head…」

「Hajime!」

「!?」

She woke up and widened her eyes when she saw Hajime. The next moment, she jumped at him while in the nude. Hajime trembled.

Yue buried her face into the scruff of Hajime's neck. He noticed she was sniffling. Unable to help it, he just stroked her head with a smile.

「Sorry, looks like I worried you a lot.」「Yeah… I was worried…」

She did not want to stop clinging to him for some time, so he let her do so until she was satisfied as thanks for taking care of him. Hajime continued to gently stroke her head.

When Yue calmed down, he asked about what happened. He made sure she covered herself with a sheet first.

「So, what happened after that? Where are we?」

「… After that…」

After the battle, she was dizzy from her magic depletion and snuggled up to Hajime who had collapsed. The double doors in the room automatically opened. While Yue remained vigilant of possible reinforcements, nothing ever came. After recovering a little bit, she entered the doorway.

The Holy Water was healing Hajime little by little, but he was still in a dangerous state with serious injuries. His tough body had escaped death, but she did not know when the Holy Water would lose to the poison. Both of them would be finished if a new monster appeared, so she needed to scout the area.

Behind those doors,

「… Abode of the Traitors.」

Inside was a vast space with a beautiful house in the center. After confirming it was not dangerous, Yue took the unconscious Hajime to a bedroom and nursed him. The liquid from the God Crystal had decreased considerably recently since Hajime had been drinking the Holy Water a lot with his injuries.

Finally, the Holy Water won over the toxins and it displayed its typical restorative powers. Yue was exhausted by this time.

「… I see, so you took care of me. Thanks, Yue.」 「Mm!」

When Hajime gave his thanks, Yue's eyes brightened in joy. She was still expressionless, but her eyes said it all.

「By the way… why am I naked?」

He was curious and wanted to get to the root of why he was naked. Hajime did not dislike Yue… but he still needed to prepare himself. Inwardly, he simply muttered to himself.

「… You were dirty… I cleaned you… 」

「… Why did you lick your lips just then? 」

Yue had a bewitching smile like when she sucked his blood before. Seeing her lick her lips, he could not help but shiver.

「Why were you sleeping next to me? Also… naked… 」 「… Fu fu… 」

「Wait, what was that? Did you do something? Don't lick your lips! 」

While Hajime questioned her intensely, Yue did not answer and simply stared at him with a voluptuous gaze.

Hajime continued questioning her, but she simply remained quiet with a happy expression. He gave up and decided to explore the area. Yue handed him some high-quality clothing she found. They were a man's clothing. Most likely, they belonged to the previous owner Hajime confirmed his health then dressed himself and prepared his equipment. There may have been traps or tricks, so he wanted to be ready in case.

When his preparations were complete, he looked back to see Yue dressed. She was…

in a single cutter shirt.

「Yue… What is your aim?」「…? Size doesn't fit.」

Well, a man's shirt certainly would not fit Yue who was only 140 centimeters tall; however, her appropriately sized breasts and pure white legs were on display. Contrary to her childish appearance, her image was quite sensational, especially with the way Yue held herself and acted. Hajime was troubled as to where to look.

「… It's quite frightening if that's natural…」

He was not sure if she was doing it on purpose or if she intentionally dressed that way. He only knew she was frightening in a variety of ways.

Leaving the bedroom, he was amazed by the sights around him. Sunlight hit his eyes. It was not real since t hey were

underground; rather, there was a globe with a cone-shaped body connected to the ceiling, and it floated there, shining. He felt some warmth, so it did not feel like artificial fluorescent lights. Hajime unintentionally called it a sun.

「… It becomes a moon at night.」「Seriously…?」

He looked around the open area when he heard the pleasant sound

of water. Behind the room was a door which led to a small stadium. In the back was a waterfall. A large quantity of water ran down the wall from the ceiling, joining a river which flowed back into the caverns. The cool wind blew from the waterfall, producing a pleasant breeze. When he took a closer look, there were fish swimming. They may have flowed in from a river above ground.

Some distance from the river, there was a large field. There was nothing planted there, though… it spread throughout the surroundings, so it could have been an animal pen. There were no signs of animals, but there were enough resources to make the area self-sufficient. Many plants grew in the area, too.

On the opposite side of the river and field existed a building which felt like it was made of processed stone. It was not meant for dwelling.

「… I looked around. There were many rooms that didn't open.」
「I see… Yue, don't let your guard down.」

「Mm…」

The stone building was white, and its texture was similar to lime; all of it felt clean. In the entrance, there was a light sphere atop a pedestal. Hajime was dazzled by it, having been in the darkness for so long. The building had three floors, and at the top was an atrium.

First, they searched the ground floor.

They discovered a fireplace, a soft carpet, and a living area with a sofa, a kitchen, and a restroom. No signs pointed out that the items

had been neglected for years. There were no signs of life… but it felt like he had returned home after a long trip. Hajime felt it gave off the atmosphere of not being used for a long time. People did not live here, but it was still being maintained…

Hajime and Yue continued their exploration with caution. When they went further inside, they found themselves outdoors once again. There was a hole in this large area and a sculpture of a lion enshrined deep in some water. Next to the sculpture was a magic formation. When he poured magic into the formation, warm water shot out of the lion's mouth. The lion seemed to have the ability to pull water from anywhere in the world.

「A bath, nice. How many months has it been?」

He relaxed on instinct. At first, Hajime did not care that he was dirty, but he was now feeling itchy, so he gave in. He gathered water using the large magic formation and wiped his body.

Hajime was Japanese, and his love of bathing was no different than his other countrymen. After securing the perimeter, he could not help but smile.

Watching him, Yue said,

「… Going in? Then together…」

「… Please let me take it easy alone.」 「Mu…」

Yue kicked the warm water with her bare foot. Hajime refused since he would be unable to relax if they went in together. Her face showed her dissatisfaction.

Both soon discovered a study room and workshop on the second floor; however, there were seals preventing the doors from opening. With no other choice, they continued their search.

The two headed to the third floor which had a laid back room. There was only one room, and when they opened the door, they

saw a exquisitely and delicately engraved magic formalization 7 to 8 meters in diameter on the floor in the center. It had a design completely unfamiliar to them. It had a splendid geometrical pattern and looked like a work of art.

However, there was something else more noteworthy. On the other side of the magic formation was a figure sitting in a regal chair.

It was a corpse. It was already a skeleton, a stunning black robe embroidered with gold lace adorning its body. There was not a single stain on it; it was like an object from a haunted house.

The corpse' head was hanging as it leaned against the chair. It had decayed in that very posture. What was the person thinking of in this room with only a single magic formation? Why did it choose this place instead of the bedroom or living room?

「… Suspicious… What will you do?」

Yue was also curious about the corpse. This person was likely one of the traitors. There were no signs of suffering on the corpse; it was as

if the person was waiting for someone.

「Well, if we want to reach the surface, I think this room is the key. The seals in the library and studio resisted Transmute… so we need to investigate. Yue, you wait here. If anything happens, I'll leave it to you.」

「Okay… Be careful.」

Hajime stepped forward toward the magic formation.

The moment he stepped into the center, a snow-white light flashed, filling the room with light.

Due to its intensity, Hajime closed his eyes. Something invaded his head as his thoughts passed to the time when he fell into the Abyss.

The light soon settled, and Hajime opened his eyes. Before him…

was a young man in a black robe.

When the magic formation grew bright, filling the room, Hajime took a stance, but he immediately relaxed. There was no hostility or malice from the young man before him, rather, there was a kindness he could feel from the man's presence. He wore the same robe as the corpse in the back of the room, so Hajime could somehow understand immediately who this person was.

When Hajime silently observed the man, his mouth slowly began moving.

「You have arrived here after overcoming many trials. My name is Oscar Orcus. I am the one who created this Labyrinth. I believe you would understand if I said I am one of the Traitors?」

The person speaking was named Oscar Orcus, and he was the creator of【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】Hajime was surprised, but kept listening.

「Ah, please don't ask questions. This is simply a recording. Unfortunately, I won't be able to answer any questions you might have. For the ones who reach this place, I will impart the truth of the world and what it is we fought for… This is simply a message. Even if I have taken this shape, please, listen… We are the Traitors, but we also are not.」

Orcus began his story. It was far different from the history the Saint Church taught as well as different from what Yue told him before; he was shocked.

It was a tale of battle between a mad God and his descendants. During the years after the Age of Gods ended, the world was filled

with strife. Humans, Demi-humans, and Devils were at war with one another. The reason for their fighting varied; territorial expansion, racial values, greed, and many other reasons. The biggest reason, however, was because each tribe was "an enemy of God."

During that time, countries and race were finely divided. Each race worshiped their own deity, and for that existence, they continued to wage war.

After centuries of constant fighting, there came people who wanted to end the war. These people were called “Liberators.”

They had a common connection. All of them were direct descendants of the Gods who existed after the Age of Gods ended. The leader of the “Liberators” had, by chance, found out the true intent of the Gods. The Gods were encouraging the wars, using their people as pawns in a war game. When he found this out, the leader set out on his mission. He gathered like -minded people who would not stand to be manipulated by the Gods who drove them to war with their games.

They located the place where the Gods resided, “The World of God.” The seven “Liberators,” with their powerful strength from ancient times, challenged the Gods.

However, their plan failed before the fight began. The Gods were the puppet masters, and they got the people to recognize the “Liberators” as enemies of God who wanted to bring destruction to the world.

The people were now their enemy, and they could not wield their power against the people they were trying to protect. When the “Liberators” were defeated, they were labeled as “Traitors” who forgot the grace of God and wanted to destroy the world.

In the end, their faction dwindled to only the seven strongest. Being the enemy of the world, they judged they were too weak to strike down the Gods. They scattered about the continent and created the seven Great Labyrinths to hide in. The Labyrinths were trials to find

a person worthy enough to hand their powers over to, someone who could accomplish what they could not.

Orcus smiled gently after finishing his long story.

「I do not know who you are or for what reason you have arrived here. I will not convince you to kill God. However, I want you to know what it is we stood for… To you, I grant my powers. You are free to use them as you will. Please do not use this power to satisfy the evil in your heart. Our conversation will come to an end here. Thank you for listening to me. You will have the freedom to do what you wish.」

After finishing, the recorded image of Orcus disappeared. Something invaded Hajime's mind at this moment. His head ached, but he quietly endured as knowledge of a certain magic was imprinted into his brain.

Soon, the pain and the magic formation settled down. Hajime slowly exhaled.

「Hajime… Are you okay?」

「Yeah, I'm good … Just, I heard something immense.」「… Mm… What do you want to do?」

Yue asked what he wanted to do after hearing Orcus' story. 「Hm? Nothing in particular? Being summoned without

permission and then asked to fight a war is bothersome. I don't even know what's going on in this world. Let's look for a way to the surface and go home. That's my only goal… Does it bother you,

Yue?」

The old Hajime may have done something; however, his values had changed, so he could easily ignore Orcus' plight. This world should have its own people deal with its problems.

Still, Yue was a resident of this world. He could not leave her alone, so he wanted to know what she wanted. He could not cut off Yue like he did Orcus because their relationship was much more tightly bound. Hajime asked for her input, but she shook her head after some hesitation.

「My place is here… Don't care about others.」

She snuggled up to Hajime and took his hand. She tried to convey her true feelings as she grasped his hand.

In the past, she devoted everything to her country. She was betrayed by those she trusted, and not a single person came to he aide. For Yue, after such a long imprisonment, the world itself was just a prison.

Hajime was the one who saved her. He was everything to her. 「… I see.」

Hajime was slightly embarrassed. He cleared his throat and told the shocking tale without hesitation.

「Ah, I also learned some new magic… from the Age of the Gods, it seems.」

「… Really?」

Yue had an expression of disbelief, but it was expected. The magic used in the Age of Gods was lost to the modern world. Still, it was a teleportation magic which summoned him and his classmates here, and that was also considered magic from the Age of the Gods.

「This magic formation on the floor will fiddle with your brain so you can use it. At least, that seems to be the case.」

「… Are you okay?」

「Yeah, no problem. This magic… seems perfect for me.」「… What kind of magic?」」

「I think it's called Creation Magic. I can add magic into minerals with it and add special properties to them.」

Yue opened her mouth hearing Hajime's explanation. 「… You can make artifacts?」

「Yeah, I can.」

Creation Magic was used to create artifacts back in the Age of the Gods. It was a magic made for "Transmuters." The truth was, Orcus himself was a "Transmuter."

「Why not learn it, Yue? Just enter the circle and it will explore your memories. Orcus said something about a trial, and you might learn it if it judges that you have passed the trial.」

「… I don't use Transmute…」

「Well, that's true, but… It's magic from long ago? It wouldn't hurt to learn it, right?」

「… Okay… If Hajime says so.」

Yue walked to the center of the circle just like Hajime advised. It shined as it probed her memories. It was time for the moment of truth…

「You have arrived here after overcoming many trials. My name is Oscar…」

Orcus appeared again. It felt like they had read some spoilers. Hajime and Yue ignored Orcus' story and continued talking to one another.

「Did you learn it?」

「Yeah. But… artifacts are difficult.」

「Yeah, I guess this kind of magic requires some affinity.」 While talking to each other, Orcus continued talking and smiling

as if nothing was happening. It was surreal. Hajime thought the corpse looked sad, but wrote it off as his imagination.

「Ah, for the time being, this place is ours now. Let's clean up the corpse.」

Hajime lacked compassion.

「Yeah… fertilize the field…」 Yue, too, lacked compassion.

Even without wind blowing, Orcus' head seemed to tilt in dejection.

In the end, Orcus' body was buried at the end of the field and a gravestone was erected. Treating him like fertilizer was indeed too pitiful.

When they finished the burial, Hajime and Yue went to the sealed rooms. They had taken a ring worn by Orcus. They were not grave robbers. On the ring was a pattern of a cross within a circle. It was the same pattern on the seals to the library and study.

They first headed to the study.

Their goal was to search for a way to the surface. Hajime and Yue unlocked the seal on the bookshelf and checked for anything noteworthy. They discovered the designs for the entire dwelling; though it was not to the level of a blueprint, there were notations as to where buildings would be placed.

「Bingo! Got it, Yue!」 「Yeah.」

Hajime let out a call of delight. Yue, too, was happy. Based on the plans, there was a magic formation on the third floor connected to the formation on the surface. The magic would not activate without Orcus' ring. Stea… Accepting the ring from him was a good idea.

When they further examined the plan, they noticed a single golem in the study which maintained the dwelling periodically. The light from the globes on the ceiling had similar properties as natural sunlight as well, meaning crops which relied on the sun could be grown. The reason this place felt so clean, even without life, was because of this golem.

The study also acted as a storage place for all the materials and artifacts Orcus made during his life. These, too, were stol…

transferred to them. There were many devices present.

「Hajime… this.」「Hm?」

Yue had been investigating other documents while Hajime was checking other plans, and she had brought him one of the books. It was Oscar's memoir. Inside were written the daily lives of his former comrades, especially the seven core members of the "Liberators." There was a passage within related to the Labyrinths the other six had made…

「… So it's that? If we conquer all the Labyrinths, we'll be able to obtain the Creator's magic?」

「… Maybe.」

According to the memoirs, just like Orcus, the other six “Liberators” were prepared to teach their magic from the Age of Gods to those that conquer the Labyrinth. Unfortunately, what type of magic was not written…

「… This might be a way home.」

As Yue had said, there was the possibility. The teleportation magic which summoned them before was from the Age of the Gods.

「Looks like we have a plan. We’ll conquer all seven Great

Labyrinths when we return to the surface.」「Mm.」

Hajime relaxed now that he had a plan. He instinctively pat Yue’s head, and her eyes squinted happily.

They looked for more information but were unable to find data showing the exact locations of the others. Currently, the confirmed Labyrinths were 【Guryuen Volcano】in Guryuen Desert and 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees.】The dungeons with rumors around them were 【Raisen Gorge】and 【Schune Snowfields.】They had no choice but to investigate them all.

Satisfied with their search, the two moved out to the studio. There were many small rooms here which they could open with

Orcus’s ring. Inside were never before seen ores and tools. There were theory books crowded in other rooms. It was, unmistakably, a paradise for Transmuters.

Hajime folded his arm and pondered as he looked over the studio. When Yue saw him, she voiced her confusion.

「… What's wrong?」

After being lost in thought for a while, Hajime made a proposal to Yue.

「Hmm~ You know, Yue, can we stay here for a bit? I want to get to the surface quickly, but… there's so much to learn, and this makes a great base. When I think about conquering the other Labyrinths, I want to prepare as much as possible here. How about it?」

Yue had been sealed underground here for more than 300 years, and she did not want to lose a second in getting to the surface. She was speechless hearing Hajime's proposal, but she approved. Hajime thought it was strange, but…

「… I'm fine if I'm with Hajime.」

That was how the conversation ended. Hajime tried to hide his embarrassment.

The two decided to train and equip themselves as much as possible here.

During the evening, when the sun changed to the moon, Hajime

soaked his entire body in the water and looked up dimly. After falling into the Abyss, this was his first time relaxing. It is often said you wash your mind in the bath.

「Hafuu～ This is the greatest～」

A mild voice one would not imagine of Hajime echoed in the bath. When his entire body began relaxing, he heard some footsteps. Having relaxed his guard, Hajime shuttered and thought, 「I came in alone!」

Needless to say, the sound of something slipping into the hot water was heard.

「Mm… Feels great…」

It was Yue. She lowered her waist next to Hajime wearing nothing over her body.

The light of the moonlight shined against her skin, a porcelain white, like a work of art. Her golden hair was glistening and soft, far better than when Hajime saw her for the first time, and it exposed the smooth, white nape of her neck with a delicious gloss.

「… Yue-san, I entered alone, didn't I?」

Hajime asked with a slightly musical tone which criticized her while feeling a heat in his body coming from something other than the heat of the hot spring.

Yue intentionally sent a sidelong flirtatious gaze filled with sex appeal as she understood Hajime's thoughts, frankly revealing her

intent.

「… Still, I refuse.」

「Hold it! Why do you know that line!」「…」

Hajime gave a verbal jab on instinct. Then he averted his gaze. Yue's skin which jumped into his gaze was a little flush. Her cheeks, too, were faintly dyed red as well. This gap with her childish appearance shot right through Hajime. He was already in a state which made it difficult to deal with her, even if he was more calm and serious than when fighting the hydra.

「… At least cover your front. There are plenty of towels.」

「I want you to look.」「…」

Hajime was at a loss for words. The heat in her voice made him grow more heated as well. His boy eagerly seemed to be saying, 「You called, Master?」

「… Mm. Hajime… Can I see?」

Yue's after me! Hajime desperately gathered his disarranged thoughts, but her voice only threw him into further disarray. His boy raged, 「Master! Prepare to intercept!」

「Y, you know, Yue. This kind of…」「… You don't like me?」

Hajime intended to scold Yue in order to calm himself down, but his voice became stuck because Yue's tone was incredibly sorrowful.

When he met her gaze, her eyes were wet.

「Of course that's not the case. I really like you.」

Without realizing it, Hajime was stressing those words. Before he realized what he said, the damage had already been done. An amazing sense of fascination appeared on Yue's face again.

「… Mm, I'm happy. Because it's Hajime, everything. Do you want

to see it all?」 「…」

Yue stood up slowly. She stood before Hajime while moving through the hot water in a relaxed manner.

The water drops ran down her smooth skin. They passed by her mounds, down her tight waist, beyond the place which should not be shown to others save for her special someone, and traced her beautiful leg lines as they returned to the hot water.

There was not a single blemish on her white and pink breasts, her beautiful navel, or her small hips. As she said, she showed him everything as she wrapped her delicate arms around his back. As expected, there was no means he could use to turn her down as she looked at him with her eyelashes turned down in embarrassment. The charm exuded by the shyness of a young girl with the seduction of an adult made an exquisite combination.

The artificial moon behind her was like an angel's halo as its light reflected off her golden hair. Her beauty and cuteness were divine.

Even the gods would require great care to make such a beautiful creature, Hajime did not doubt this in the least.

Hajime could not express this with mere words. To show how intent her words are, she would leave an impression that would not let her out of his mind.

「Fu fu…」

「Ha!?」

Hajime's thoughts returned hearing Yue's happy, glossy voice. He then noticed Yue's eyes were turned down to the part of Hajime which was vividly expressing his feelings. In his mind, he could hear 「Master! It's a raid!」as he looked for a means of strategic

retreat.

As it was, his fangs would be stripped of him at this rate. Simply because he thought Yue important, he felt intimidated by the “Force” she exerted. As a man, he wanted to make a distinction when forming a deep relationship.

But this would not pass with the Blood Sucking Princess in front of him, as she would not withdraw. Nor would she allow Hajime to withdraw.

「… Here.」

「… Ah, can’t you feel that?」 「I can feel it.」

「Again, why do you know that material! Honestly, I’m getting out of here!」

After feeling various soft places as Yue clung to him from the front, he saw her lovely hip line before his eyes, and the army that was Hajime’s reason began collapsing. At this rate, he would become a beast without an ego and covet the important woman before his eyes.

But…

「I won’t let go!」

「Wai, hol, ah, ahh—!!!」

It was impossible to run from the Blood Sucking Princess.

As for what happened afterward… it is as everyone can imagine.

It had been 2 months since Yue showed Hajime the dignity of an elder, and a variety of breakthroughs occurred after that night.

As for Hajime, though he continued enhancing his body and heart against the crazy monsters of the Abyss, he had a 0% chance of victory against Yue's onslaught. As such, he decided to seriously accept her.

Hajime was aware of Yue's feelings, and he did promise to take her along with him. His reason for dodging her earlier advances was so he would not lose sight of his goals.

Now, he had conquered the Labyrinth and established a secure base. His goal was partially achieved when he had a plan to return home, and now, his mind had time to think about other things. His fragile reasoning could not oppose Yue's approach. Furthermore, his reason did not exist anymore.

The two made full use of the base. Anyone from the side would likely yell 「Just explode already!!」every day. Far in the distance, a demoness appeared behind a female student, frightening her best friend.

「… Hajime, does it feel good?」「Yeah, it does.」

「Fu fu… then here?」

「Yeah, that's good, too.」

「… I'll make you feel even better.」 Yue was not than doing anything erotic.

She wore a short skirt and dark stockings over her sensational legs as she sat over Hajime, massaging his left arm. Hajime's left arm was gone below the elbow. In its place was an artificial arm which extended up to his shoulder. She had been massaging him regularly so he could grow accustomed to it.

His prosthetic arm was an artifact, and it could be used like a real arm with direct manipulation of magic. The arm had a pseudo-neural mechanism, allowing it to send signals via magic to his brain, giving him a sense of touch. The arm had a silver luster with black lines along it, and, in certain parts of the arm, there were magic formations and patterns engraved.

It was fitted with numerous gimmicks. He had designed it similar to the items in the studio where Oscar worked, but Hajime added his own original elements to it. He used many of the special ores and Creation Magic to make it. If this artifact was out in the world, it would be a national treasure. Naturally, ordinary people would be unable to use it, since Magic Manipulation was a prerequisite skill for its utility.

In 2 months, their abilities and equipment had been enhanced; they were nothing like their previous selves. Hajime's Status Plate currently showed the following.

＝＝＝

Nagumo Hajime 17 Years Male Level: ???
Class: Transmuter
STR: 10950
VIT: 13190
RES: 10670
AGI: 13450
MAG: 14780
MDEF: 14780
Skill: **Transmute**
[+Mineral Appraisal]
[+Precision Transmute]
[+Mineral Investigation]
[+Mineral Extraction]
[+Mineral Fusion]
[+Transmute Reproduction]
[+Transmute Compression]
Magic Manipulation
[+Magic Radiation]
[+Magic Compression]
[+Remote Control]
Stomach Strengthening
Lightning Clad
Divine Step
[+Air Walk]
[+Ground Contraction]

[+Grand Kick]
[+Light Speed] □
Wind Claw □**Night Vision** □**Far Sight** □
Physical Perception
[+Focused Perception]
□**Magic Perception**
[+Focused Perception]
□**Heat Perception**
[+Focused Perception]
□
Presence Interception
[+Illusion Step] □
Poison Tolerance □
Paralysis Tolerance □
Petrification Tolerance □
Panic Tolerance □ □
All Attribute Resist □
Foresight □
Strength of Gold □
Grand Punch □
Overpower

□**Telepathy**
□**Tracking**

High Speed Magic Recovery □**Magic Conversion** [＋Physical Strength] [＋Healing Capacity] □**Limit Break** □**Creation Magic**

□**Language Comprehension**

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There was a drastic change in his equipment as well. First, Hajime obtained a useful artifact known as “Treasure Warehouse.” It was a ring artifact Oscar kept on his person. It was a ring with a 1 centimeter jewel in the center, and it could create an alternate space in which to store items. It was precisely like the Hero’s item bag in games. The size of the space was unknown, but it was certainly large. Even after putting all his equipment, tools, and materials in, there was more than enough space remaining. Just by putting magic in, he could retrieve them. The withdrawn items could appear anywhere within a 1 meter radius of him.

It was an extremely convenient artifact, especially for Hajime who had only one arm. Since he could have things appear within a certain field, Hajime thought it would be useful for reloading. He was half successful with his attempt. It required a precise operation , and he could not directly transfer the bullets into his weapons. His limit was to arrange the bullets in front of him at a set position and distance. In short, while he could not load a magazine, he could suspend them in air and attempt to reload in this way.

In that respect, he felt a soft casing used to load revolver type weapons was most suitable for this aerial reloading. However, structurally, the strength would fall. Furthermore, the reloading itself was a difficult action to perform.

So Hajime decided to improve on his weapons by allowing the barrel portion to open up. With a gimmick, he could run magic through it to open the gun up and eject the old bullets out. With this, he could perform a gun spin to reload his bullets in midair.

After intense training for 1 month, Hajime had mastered aerial

reloading. The reason he could do so was because of his “Light Speed” skill. This unique magic raised his concentration to the limits, which allowed him to reload in midair in this slow world.

Beside this, Hajime also made a magically driven two wheeled vehicle, “Stiefe,” and a magically driven four wheeled vehicle, “Brise.”

They were, literally, two wheelers and four wheelers powered by magic, armored using the mineral with the greatest hardness in this world, Azanthium Ore, and armed with numerous weapons like out of a spy movie. Hajime was a boy. He grew a little heated when it came to militaristic things. He had become a little too crazed, causing Yue to become sulky, and it was only after he was squeezed in a number of ways that she regained her good mood…

He had also developed the “Evil Eye.”

Hajime lost his right eye in the fight against the hydra. Because of the heat of the aurora, his eye had evaporated, and he could not recover this “loss” with Holy Water. Yue had also been involved in its development, and, eventually, the two created the “Evil Eye.”

Even Creation Magic could not make a normal “eyeball.” But using Creation Magic with the God Crystal, he was able to make his magic eye with the special vision of “Magic Perception” and “Foresight.”

Using the same pseudo nerves that were used in his prosthetic arm, the Evil Eye could send images to the brain. It did not grant normal vision; rather, it recognized the strength and attribute of magic by color. He could see the very core of an invoked magic.

The core referred to the area which maintained and operated the magic. After invoking magic, the magic itself acted according to the formation; however, he had never given thought to how the formation itself was linked to the magic as it traveled further away. None of the books or instructors had ever mentioned anything about this, perhaps because it was not known. Even Yue had not known about this.

“Magic Perception” as a skill was similar to “Physical Perception.” It was able to perceive a vague sense on the location and number. Demons which could hide their presence played into how effective these skills were. With the Evil Eye, he was able to know what type and how strong the magic was. Hajime could even destroy the magic by destroying the core of magic; however, shooting that would be like shooting a bullet through a pinhole; it would require ridiculous accuracy.

The reason the God Crystal was used was because it could retain magic better than other materials. That was the reason, Hajime thought, that it could contain a vast amount of magic. Since he was still inexperienced with Creation Magic, he was unable to grant more magic than those two. With its potential, however, he may have been able to apply more magic once he became more skilled.

Because they used God Crystal for the Evil Eye, it constantly gave off a pale light. Hajime’s right eye was constantly shining. There was no way to stop it, so Hajime reluctantly put on a black eye patch made of thin cloth.

He had white hair, an artificial arm, and an eye patch. He had completely become a character straight out of 8th Grade Syndrome

fantasy. When he looked into the mirror, he fell to his knees in despair. He stayed in bed for a day after this, and Yue tried to comfort him by various means… but no one wanted to talk about it.

As for weaponry, Hajime had revived Schlagen after its destruction. He strengthened the weapon with Azanthium Ore as well. Since he no longer had to worry about carrying it, he doubled the length of the barrel to 3 meters. He also added on a scope with “Far Sight” imbued. With this, he could fire up to 10 kilometers away.

Remembering the struggle he had when chased by the horde of raptors, Hajime developed the gatling rail gun, Metzelei, which fired 30 caliber rounds at twelve -thousand rounds per minute through its six rotary barrel. The barrels were created from various ores from the studio and imbued with a magic to help cool them down; even so, it could not be used for more than 5 minutes continuously, and it would require at least 10 minutes to cool down if it overheated.

For surface supremacy, as well as his hobbies , Hajime also developed a rocket and missile launcher, Orcan. It had a rectangular shaped and a twelve round rotary magazine which allowed for consecutive firing. There were a variety of rockets as well.

To top it off, he created another revolver type gun to pair with Donner which he called Schlag. Now that Hajime could use two arms, he felt it good to learn how to use Gun Kata as a basic fighting style. With Yue as the typical rear guard, he decided to develop a more efficient close combat style so he could easily coordinate with Yue. Even so, since he was properly equipped, he was more of an all-rounder.

He had created other equipment and tools as well, and, eventually, the God Crystal was depleted of its Holy Water. He only had a few containers of Holy Water remaining. Though they tried to pour magic into the God Crystal, they were unable to extract Holy Water. Perhaps after many years of concentration, it would flow once again.

Still, throwing the God Crystal away would have been a waste. It had saved his life… and was a sort of lucky charm. Good luck piled upon good luck when he reached this stone. Hajime was extraordinarily attached to it. Loneliness was unbearable to a survivor who painted a face on one of his remaining personal belongings, gave it a name, and admired it.

Hajime, using its characteristic of being able to store massive amounts of magic, transmuted into necklaces, earrings, and rings, making accessories. He presented them to Yue.

Yue was able to use very powerful magic, and her most powerful spells consumed a significant amount of her magic. Just one shot could potentially leave her depleted. If she was able to stock her magic up in these like a battery, she could use her Supreme Rank magic in rapid succession without becoming fatigued.

He named the accessory set “Magic Crystal Series” and gave it to Yue. As for her reaction…

「… Proposal?」

「The hell’s with that?」

Yue jumped the first time Hajime spoke in the Kansai dialect. 「It

will prevent your magic exhaustion. I thought they would be

able to protect you from now on.」「… So it is a proposal.」

「No, just new equipment.」「… Hajime, shy.」

「… You haven't been listening to me at all recently, have you?」
「… Shy in bed, too.」

「Won't you stop !? Seriously!」「Hajime…」

「Haa～ What is it?」

「Thank you… I love you.」「… Yeah.」

Hurry up and explode! The two created their own little world. They were ready for everything in many ways.

10 days after that, Hajime and Yue set off for the surface. While they activated the magic formation on the third floor,

Hajime spoke to Yue in a quiet voice.

「Yue… My weapons and our powers are heresy on the surface. The Saint Church and the countries will not remain silent.」

「Mm…」

「They'll demand our weapons and our artifacts. There's a high chance they'll try to coerce us into participating in their war.」

「Mm…」

「This will be a dangerous journey, and the world may turn against us. No matter how many lives you have, it might not be enough.」

「Saying that so late…」

Hajime smiled bitterly at her words. He gently stroked her soft hair as she stared at him. She squinted in pleasure. He took a moment and stared at her sparkling red eyes. He put his wish and resolution into words, carving them into his very soul.

「I will protect you, Yue, and you will protect me. We are the strongest. We will mow all down, and we will cross worlds.」

Hearing these words, Yue grasped both hands before her chest, as if grasping something. Her expressionless face vanished to

reveal a blooming smile. She answered like always. 「Mm!」

Epilogue

At the base of a deep ravine, a place which could be called a scar carved into the earth, a dry place with not a single drop of water flowing, rocks small and large rolled about. There was no need to strain the ears, as groans of brutal demons echoed throughout, perhaps this was the sound of the law of the jungle.

Here, humanity's strongest weapon, "magic" could not be used; there was little one can do but become food. To escape, one must climb out of the gorge up a cliff hundreds of meters high, and doing so would attract attention, calling out for demons to feast.

Though there were stairs leading out of the valley at the east and west edges, demons would not miss bait which fell to the depths after so much trouble.

As such, this place became synonymous with Hell. Or perhaps it was simply a convenient execution ground.

In this place where survival was difficult, a single shadow moved. Rabbit ears appeared in the gap between large rocks.

The rabbit ears brought a charm unbecoming to the hell that was the bottom of the ravine. Piko piko, the rabbit ears moved left and right, searching for signs.

Before long, deciding there was no danger in the surroundings, the head attached to the rabbit ears appeared from the shadow of the

rock. It was not an animal but a person, a girl in her mid-teens with rabbit ears. She looked at her surroundings to confirm the safety.

She was a beautiful girl. Even though dirty from the severe atmosphere of the gorge, even if her clothes were ragged, any man would have his gaze deprived by her. She had bluish-gray hair and eyes a heavenly blue which brought about a sense of mystery.

This mysterious girl…

「Uu～ That was really scary～ I was lying on my futon, and now my snacks are all broken～」

In a variety of meanings, she was quite spoiled.

For a while, this unfortunate beautiful woman with rabbit ears muttered her complaints. Pechi pechi, she slapped her cheeks to motivate herself and muttered, 「But at this rate, my family and I will become snacks for the demons.」 Strength shined in her eyes as she looked deep into the gorge.

「… I hope they get here soon. Those people I saw in the future.」 The rabbit-eared girl stood up resolutely and ran to the point she

stared at.

- A few moments later, a miserable 「Hii～! I'm not delicious!」 echoed through the gorge.

Extra Chapter

Beneath the vast, underground space. Only the illumination of the Green Light Stone could be seen, spreading two shadows out.

Huge pillars with grand reliefs carved into them were lined up in the underground; two shadows ran parallel side by side along the pillars.

A spear of flame appeared in an instant, and one of the two shadows hid behind a pillar. The dim underground was dyed a vivid scarlet as the flame changed orbit, as if homing in on the tense shadow.

Next,

Dopan!

A dry explosion sounded as a bright crimson flash tore through the darkness. The light seemed to expand like a spear, colliding into the approaching flame spear and piercing through the heart of it, the 《Magic Core.》 In that instant, the spear of flame disappeared.

As if ignoring the spear of flame, a lance of ice made its way outward. The ice drew a beautiful arc as it flew toward the second shadow.

With the sound of gunfire, this, too, disappeared. 「… Mm. If it's

just one, I can't reach. Then… 」

With her back to a pillar, the girl — looking much like a Bisque Doll — the fair haired, rouge eyed Yue, whispered quietly to herself as she compressed one, two, four, eight stones of flame, doubling them until 64 in total appeared.

It took her only 2 seconds. If a normal magic user saw this, surely his jaw would drop. Neither aria nor magic formation was used; this was clearly abnormal, going against the common sense of the modern age.

Yue calmly and readily used magic in such a miraculous manner. The next moment, as she moved her fingers like a conductor guiding an orchestra, the flaming rocks dashed out, firing like a miniature meteor storm on her target — Hajime, who remained on the other side of the pillar.

「 Tch, isn't this jump a bit too much? 」

His light curses reached Yue's ears. Next, the roar of consecutive attacks spread out as Yue felt the magic she created disperse one after another. Though the timing was not simultaneous, the bullets themselves seemed to move together all in an instant.

Because each attack was intercepted, it could be said Hajime's abilities were considerable. No, rather, they became considerable.

It had been a little over 1 month since that day when Hajime decided to remain in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】He had spent every day enhancing his equipment and training. Hajime had improved his precision shooting with the aid of the Evil Eye to the point

where he could send a thread through a pinhole as well as practicing his ability with aerial reloads.

Yue acted as his partner and fired magic, and he persevered until he could intercept her attacks; at first, even with the magic tracing a static path, Hajime failed, but now he could intercept attacks in combat at a rate of approximately 50%, and for single targets, 100%.

This foul skill was developed in less than a month with a large increase in his physical stats having defeated and eaten demons as well as the skill “Light Speed,” though Hajime’s own willpower was the largest reason.

What gave birth to this willpower was his desire to return home, “together with Yue.” Knowing she was included in his desires, Yue was delighted to see Hajime’s perseverance.

「… Mm, Hajime.」

Yue muttered her beloved Hajime’s name with a hot sigh. Even in the midst of a mock battle, she found it difficult to control her overflowing emotions.

Needless to say, without her intent, her emotions caused her magic to become more extreme.

「H, hold it! No matter how you look at it, that’s too much!」「… Hm?」

Yue returned from her thoughts hearing the slightly angry voice. Then she noticed. Before she realized it, what wildly danced about Hajime were a hundred bullets of fire, enclosing him as he sporadically attacked them with exquisite timing.

Apparently her zeal and desires for Hajime came out too much, and she unconsciously formed more fire bullets; as for why they were dancing about, they were reflecting her happy emotions. In a sense, she perfectly aided Hajime's training with this surprise attack.

She created her magic unconsciously, and, while she did not make a mistake in her control, she was essentially close to doing so. When it came to magic, calling Yue a genius was unworthy. Her magic came about and acted all because of her yearning for him.

「… It's because I like you too much, Hajime, it's burning.」「Hey, that was sudden. And it burns, there are too many!」

Hajime had a desperate look as he continued intercepting the flames which danced about irregularly. Already he could no longer stop the attacks and had to use Donner & Schlag to beat away some of the attacks. This training was meant for him to improve his ability to fire through the core of magic, but seeing as it was now requiring him to combine other skills, in a certain sense, it was excellent training…

「Shi—」

As expected, one-hundred flame bullets dancing about energetically was too much for the present Hajime, and he had been training for several hours, leading to his making a mistake.

Kin, a small sound echoed as six bullets appeared in the air. Hajime had opened Donner up and shut it with a full rotation. However, Hajime failed his reloading.

This caused a delay in Hajime's ability to stop the flame bullets in the air. Judging it impossible to completely evade the attacks with his position, he decided to intercept them with "Strength of Gold."

Then,

「Mm. How about a break.」

Muttering this, Yue snapped her fingers and the flame bullets quickly dispersed.

「Haa～ Haa, haa. Shit, I'm still not a point where I won't make a mistake.」

Hajime stored away Donner & Schlag in their holsters and took deep breaths with his hands on his knees, grinding his teeth in mortification. The eye peering out beneath his white hair was burning red, and a blood vessel pulsed on his temple, seemingly ready to burst at any moment.

Though Yue wanted to praise him for working hard to this point, she knew those words would not resound in Hajime's mind. Still, Yue approached Hajime and sat down, swatting at her knee.

Yue was currently wearing a miniskirt and knee socks with a frilly dress shirt, her so-called “Absolute Territory” exposed. The knee socks stuck tight to her legs in a sexy manner.

Having learned about Yue’s body thoroughly after his virtue was deprived by her in the bathroom, he did not get flustered and rested his head on her lap.

Still, still…

「I will never be on the attack, will I?」

Right, this was what he was anxious about. He was lying weakened from the training now. If I attack now, even Hajime will fall! There’s a wolf nearby, it’s natural to be cautious! Usually it was the opposite when it comes to sex.

「… How terrible. It’s like I’m a thug.」

「I felt the same way the first time, too… no, let’s stop. It feels like I’ll just be strangling myself.」

Hajime shook his head as if removing something from his mind and simply relaxed on Yue’s lap. He could feel a sensation of happiness on the back of his head. As Yue’s soft hand gently caressed his hair, he could feel it extend to his mind.

Yue, while looking at Hajime with a relaxed gaze, asked uneasily hearing Hajime’s words.

「… Did you hate it?」

「That’s impossible. But it wasn’t that pleasant, either, I would normally resist. Well, a man’s dignity is worthless anyway, so don’t worry about it.」

Her unease disappeared in an instant. 「… Mm.」 Yue answered as she bent down, placing her lips on Hajime's naturally. The sound of wet kisses running against the tip of his nose, his cheeks, and lips, if any bachelor were to see this sweet atmosphere, they would surely want to shoot him with his anti-material rifle.

Seeing Hajime look away in embarrassment, Yue smiled mischievously and opened her mouth.

「… Then did it feel good?」

「Hey, Yue. Isn't that enough about this topic?」

「… So it didn't feel good?」

Hajime attempted to change the topic, but Yue continued with a somewhat sad tone. 「Guu,」 he muttered as he regretted his immaturity.

「That, well, how should I put it… It was good, I think.」

What am I saying… his expression said; still, those were the words she had wanted to hear.

Hearing those words, Yue gave off a fluffy atmosphere as her eyes looked distant.

「Mm… I want to thank my teacher.」

「And my feelings are pretty complicated, I think.」

Who was this teacher Yue is talking about? Long ago, Yue was a princess, and she was educated by a woman; until the day she was confined in the Abyss by her uncle, this teacher worried about Yue.

Apparently Yue was giving thanks to this teacher who taught her about various night- related activities. Since Yue was royalty, naturally she would remain chaste until marriage. At the same time, she had the duty to leave a child. As such, she was given knowledge on relationships as well as how to receive her bridegroom.

Surely it is because of this “Teacher” that Hajime was constantly being made a toy of in their night battles.

As an aside, 「By chance, are you experienced…」 Hajime suspected Yue. Since Yue also had the unique magic, “Automatic Regeneration,” if by chance…

But Hajime could not forget Yue’s expression at that time for the rest of his life. Though he did not fear even the hydra in the Abyss, he was completely a “frog glared at by the snake” at that time.

Needless to say, he was punished for his rude remark by the girl who had shown him proof of her first time. 「I’m seriously sorry, please, forgive me,」 he tried to say, but the words meant little at that time.

「All right, let’s have another match before we grab something to eat.」

「… Hm, are you okay?」

「I'm not fine at all. But there's no meaning if I don't go beyond my limits. Sorry, but I'd like you to stick with me a bit more, Yue.」

「… Mm.」

Though Yue used a large amount of magic in their mock battle earlier, there was no problem if she used the "magic stones" which stored magic. Using "Light Speed" and "Limit Break" together was an intense drain on Hajime's magic power, but she could not easily stop his unreasonable actions seeing his determined look.

Hajime sat up from Yue's lap and took distance from her before facing her. He pulled out Donner & Schlag, took his stance, and cried out.

「Now, no need to hold back. Come! You Magic Cheat!」「Mm. Take this, "Endless Violence!"」

Secretly, Hajime thought「There's no way a magic with that name exists,」but the bullets of fire truly did make the name seem plausible. As an aside, the reason the attacks were not at a safe level was because Hajime demanded it of her.

In order to shoot the fire bullets which approached like a wall, Hajime activated "Light Speed" to increase his perception speed. The Evil Eye beneath his eye patch caught the magic cores in the world where time flowed slowly.

He shot bullets, one after another, through the fire bullets. Bright crimson flashes flew through the air as cartridges fell to the ground before he reloaded the next rounds.

He turned Donner and Schlag in his hand like a round shield to stop the fire bullets from attacking fiercely.

The number of fire bullets and their speed increased. Hajime, while marveling at Yue's magic capabilities in his mind, accelerated his movements while ignoring the pain beneath his eye and within his head…

「… Yue. Can I ask something?」

「… Hm?」

With neither pulling back, Hajime had an expression of enduring a headache in a different sense. 「What is it?」 Yue's expression seemed to ask as she seriously did not understand already.

「Why, why are all the fire bullets in the shape of a heart?」 「…」

Right. Before he became aware of it, all the fire bullets flying about him were heart shaped. Though the speed and power had increased, the shape was quite vivid. They were formed in an extraordinary fashion, an amazingly and useless show of skill.

And when he asked this of Yue…

「… Mm. You're shooting through them.」

She was manipulating hundreds of heart shaped fire bullets with one hand while the other was holding her cheek in embarrassment. Meanwhile, Hajime's bullets were firing through Yue's hearts. Immediately before they dispersed, the flames seemed to blaze strongly.

「Are you helping me train seriously?」

「… I am doing this seriously. I'm seriously trying to push— ahem. Knock you down.」

「Hey, just now, were you saying you were trying to push me down?」

「… Every day, you push your body to the limits. It isn't good if you don't rest every once in a while. But you don't stop, Hajime, until you faint.」

「… Isn't that the point?」

「… Mm. So I'll win and forcefully take you down… to the bed.」
「You're licking your tongue right now, aren't you? Doesn't that

mean I won't get any rest at all!」

Apparently, Yue intended to overwhelm Hajime to stop him from training so she could force him to rest. Still, this did not answer his initial question as to why her flame bullets were heart shaped. Judging how she had licked her lips, the answer was obvious, as well as what she wanted given her bewitching atmosphere.

Fu fu fu, while smiling, the intensity of Yue's magic increased. She added in bullets of wind which specialized in speed as well as orbs of thunder with irregular paths. As expected, they were both heart shaped.

「Ku, it can't be, do you have some grudge against me because I asked you to be my partner until I fainted this past week!?」

「… I don’t particularly have a grudge… just a bit lonely.」 Seeing her pout, it was easy to imagine the delicious future

awaiting him when he was sent flying.

Because Hajime was a man, of course he did not hate it, but…

He could not accept being defeated so easily due to his pride as a man. Because of this, Hajime concentrated more and more on intercepting the attacks. Since Yue could very well exhaust her magic, if he could continue intercepting attacks until then, Hajime could defend his pride.

But…

「Yue, you’re serious, aren’t you!?」 「Mm!!」

For the time being, she had not forgotten the point of training being his ability to intercept her attacks with precision fire, but the fact that she was now using Intermediate Rank magic showed how serious Yue was being. It had now become some form of bizarre barrage play. Hajime was breathing roughly, and he broke out in a cold sweat while Yue was smiling in a bewitching matter and laughing, 「Fu fu.」

「You won’t win against me every time! Don’t think my pride is that weak!」

In the end, there was no point in “Overcoming” this barrage of attacks, or perhaps it had a meaning in a more pink sense.

A bright crimson spiral of magic surrounded Hajime as he utilized “Limit Break” which allowed him to surpass the hydra. Hajime’s specs increased three-fold.

「Mu, as expected of you, Hajime. You’re coping with my serious barrage.」

「I, am, honored.」

「… Mm. Hajime is always my first.」

「Aren’t you, embarrassed, saying that!?」

Hajime’s words were fragmented as he concentrated on stopping the barrage of attacks; still, he managed to respond to Yue’s remark.

Even so, Yue was not simply fooling around since she intended to throw Hajime into confusion mentally; by using “Limit Break,” he was nearing the limits of his body, and he would soon collapse to the point where he would need the Holy Water to recover easily. She wanted to decide this match before Hajime hit that limit.

Still, little by little, Yue was showing her own fatigue. Because she was mainly using Beginner Rank magic, it took time. The magic efficiency was high, but while maintaining them, her magic naturally was draining. While Yue had her unique magic, “Automatic Regeneration,” it would only apply to physical injuries

and would not replenish her magical or physical strength.

Still, because she did not want Hajime to continue tormenting his body, she exerted all her strength!

「Here, it comes, you still, aren't giving up!?」

「Mm. This Limit Break, it's easy as long as I have love!」

「You're not, the, only one!」

Yue was a magic cheat, and it seems her love was a cheat as well. The wall of attacks swelled up as the speed of her bullets increased.

While handling two guns as well as manipulating magic through his artificial arm, it was impossible for Hajime, even when using "Limit Break," to match her attacks. Perception aside, the attack surpassed the capacity of his judgment. There were no existences like this amongst the demons in this Abyss, so he was lacking in experience. In that sense, this was a good exercise.

Yue gradually cut the distance between the two down. Her hands were placed in front of her as she licked her tongue. Her movements were unsteady from her lack of magic, causing her to look like a departed soul.

For multiple reasons, though Hajime raised his own spirits so as to not be defeated, the Yue who demonstrated some unknown Limit Break with her love… could not be stopped!

And finally…

「Shit. Stop it!」「… But I refuse.」

Hajime failed, and though it was a mistake he could recover from immediately, the Blood Sucking Princess would not let the chance go. She closed in quickly and grabbed Hajime.

Then,

「… It's my win. Now then, time for a meal.」「Wai, ho— ahh —!!」

His bright crimson magic raged about for a different reason than him breaking through his limits. Meanwhile, the magic dispersed into the sky.

Like the demons killed in the Abyss, the record of his defeats was updated once again today. If he had abandoned intercepting her attacks and took evasive action, he would have a better chance of escaping from Yue, but the hot emotions Yue expressed toward Hajime had hit their mark; as such, Hajime could not physically resist Yue. In a sense, he was mentally dependent on her.

The sound of meat sizzling could be heard as a pleasant fragrance spread outward.

They were in a kitchen in Oscar Orcus's hideout. As expected of the user of Creation Magic, the kitchen in Oscar's house was filled with artifacts such that it was like a modern-day kitchen.

In the kitchen, Hajime had one hand on a frying pan while searing

an extra-large steak. Next to him, Yue had her hair bunched up in a ponytail as she prepared a salad and broiled fish in a white apron tailored to her body.

The ingredients for the salad were taken from the fields grown in Oscar's retreat. An artifact promoting growth was buried beneath the soil, and typically each seed would grow up to provide food roughly once a week; this was dug up and placed in Treasure Warehouse. Still, this artifact required a huge amount of magic, so it was usually impossible to use if not for someone like Hajime.

With the meat cooked to a good degree, Hajime sprinkled salt and pepper (which he also stored in Treasure Warehouse) while listening to Yue humming 「Fun fun fu fun ♪」 in a good mood.

Her light and soft fair hair shook and swung, revealing her white neck beneath. The loose hairs at the edge seemed sensuous for no particular reason. Perhaps it was because he was still basking in the joy of the "Rest" he enjoyed a while ago.

The words "newly married woman" floated in Hajime's head. Hajime simply shook his head in amazement, thinking 「What am I thinking.」

Perhaps noticing Hajime, Yue turned her gaze and tilted her head toward Hajime. With Hajime unable to deceive her, she smiled mischievously and lifted the edges of her frilly apron in a cute manner.

「… Does it suit me?」

「… I think it looks good.」

Seeing Yue spin about, naturally Hajime could not deny a single word and could only honestly give his impression. Though she asked herself, Yue blushed in embarrassment, her long eyelashes shaking. Her service spirit overflowed from her joy in being praised.

「… Then how about I wear only the apron?」

A shock ran through Hajime's body. 「Impossible, the thing from legends?」 He looked at Yue, his gaze trembling. Yue played with the edge of her apron as she continued pursuing Hajime!

Hajime shook his head, feeling the danger of rushing into a "Rest" again at this rate. Yue did not particularly seem disappointed. 「I'll leave that for the night battle,」 she said, but Hajime decided he had not heard it.

After the meat finished grilling, Hajime and Yue sat at the table. The dishes were placed on the transparent table as they sat on a soft sofa. As an aside, though there were two, one on either side, Hajime and Yue sat by one another. Rather, Yue never sat anywhere except next to Hajime.

「Now, time to eat…」

「Mm, do your best, Hajime.」

Before the appetizing meat, Hajime steeled himself. Yue, too, had an anxious look. Yue watched as Hajime bit into the meat…

「Gu, uu… Gaa.」

He groaned, and his body stiffened. To say nothing of the meat, his lips seemed to be tight to the point where it seemed like his teeth would be crushed. His tightly clenched jaw and shaking hands showed something abnormal was happening. Still, Hajime continued eating the meat he prepared and endured the “pain” which was intense with every bite. Yue anxiously pat his back and poured a cup of Holy Water to him.

「I’ve been eating this for a month already, and it still hurts… that snake bastard, how strong was it?」

Indeed, what Hajime was eating was the hydra, the beast of the final trial in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】

Since the day he awoke, Hajime had eaten the meat of the hydra. Though he did not experience growth with the flesh of typical demons, he was still being wracked with pain at this moment. Even if not influenced by other demons, the hydra, in the end, was an exception.

「… Mm. It really must be different. Not just Oscar, it must be a collaboration with the other “Liberators.”」

「Guess so. Our victory was likely because a number of impossible elements came together at once. This Labyrinth, this Abyss, it feels like conquering the other Great Labyrinths is necessary. It would be hard to deal with without one or two Age of Gods Magic.」

According to Hajime’s words, the demon meat changed depending on the quality of the demon’s body; with how the meat was now, it would be extremely difficult for Hajime to defeat the hydra on his own.

One cause of victory was obviously the weapons he had created. They were high in destructive power to the point where they disregarded his own physical specifications. If Hajime did not have these and fought with sword and magic, he would surely have lost due to a lack of offensive capabilities.

Furthermore, he had to use Holy Water numerous times, which played a great role. If not for this, Hajime would likely have been unable to reach the lowest level. Rather, he would have died from his wounds on the first level of the Abyss, or perhaps petrified by the basilisk on the floors below. The Holy Water saved him from mortal wounds countless times.

The last factor would be Yue. She could, while ignoring aria and magic formation, exercise Supreme Rank magic. This buried any issue of attack range and power, repelling many demons, including the hydra.

In a word, Hajime being able to conquer the Abyss, rather than due to his own physical abilities, was due to his overwhelming weapons and superior healing medicine as well as the cheat-like magic ability.

Before long, Hajime finished eating the hydra meat and got over the pains in his body, and, finally, he returned to a normal diet, eating the fish, taken from the nearby stream, and vegetables beneath his eyes.

「With all the demon meat I'm eating, this dish is delicious enough, but…」

「… Mm, it's still too flat to be a proper meal.」

Hajime muttered while stuffing his mouth with vegetables, a slightly disappointed expression on his face. Yue ate the fish as well and matched his sentiments.

Hajime came from Earth where the gastronomic culture was well developed, and Yue was a former member of royalty, experiencing delicious dishes on a regular basis. Whether baked, boiled, or stir-fried, their meals were simple, leading to their dissatisfaction.

「… I'm sorry, Hajime. If I only knew how to cook more…」「No, no need to apologize. You were royalty before. I doubt

you'd ever hear of a princess preparing meals. It's the same for me, I should have properly learned to cook.」

Because it was the two of them, a member of royalty and a high school student from the present age, they were not well versed in cooking.

Yue was depressed having been unable to present a suitable dish to her lover. She pouted while thinking of her teacher who taught her about night-time techniques but not cooking.

Seeing Yue like this, Hajime scratched his cheek.

「Well, how should I say this. My mom's a good cook, so we can just have her teach you.」

「! Yeah… yeah! Cooking with your mother. I look forward to it.」

In response to Hajime's words, Yue's eyes shined with stars. Learning to cook, standing next to Hajim's mom while looking at Hajime and his dad in the living room eating the dishes she made with his mom, saying 「Delicious!」

Imagining this happy scene, Yue's typically deadpan face loosened.

「Ah, right, then Yue can take care of breakfast and lunch. Mom usually only cooks at night… right, breakfast and lunch.」

「… Mm, leave it to me.」

Hajime's mother was a popular shoujo manga-ka, so she left in the mornings for work, and she had no time to cook most meals. Hajime, too, often stayed up late in the night playing games to help with his parents' work. Because of that, he was always drowsy in the morning and throughout the day, so he had gone many years without eating a particularly good meal at those times.

But if Yue learned to cook, it would be quite luxurious. A fair-haired maiden's handmade lunch box… When he was in Japan, he would never give this a thought.

(… No, if it comes to a beautiful girl's homemade lunch box, I've had it before. From that girl who is a constant thorn in my side.)

After returning to Earth, he did not know what kind of life he would have, but imagining eating Yue's lunch box at school gave Hajime an indescribable itchy sensation. He then recalled a distant memory.

At school, Hajime had finished his lunch and was preparing to nap as usual when he was given a lunch by Shirasaki Kaori. Like the day they were summoned, Hajime had lost to his drowsiness, but Kaori somewhat forcibly invited him. She smiled while dropping a bomb as she normally did.

Hajime had a cramp in his face as she split her lunch with him. Naturally, eating the homemade dishes of the girl called the Goddess of the school, he could only imagine what would happen, the class itself aside. Though Hajime stopped her early on… she looked lonely. Seeing Kaori dejectedly put her lunch box away, the class grew blood-thirsty.

It was hell if he moved forward and hell if he pulled back. In the end, he responded to Kaori's good will.

Hajime clearly remembered as Kaori watched him eat while he was in a cold sweat.

Hajime felt a chill run down his back at that time and returned from his reminiscing. He looked to the side and saw Yue with an expression difficult to describe.

「… Hajime. Who is the woman?」

「…」

It was concerning that she somehow understood. Still, excuses were useless in front of one of the seven wonders of the world that was a woman's intuition. An excuse would not pass. It definitely would

not pass. Her abilities of penetration were far too superb.

「… The classmate I told you about.」

「… The woman who caused you to fall?」

「Well, I suppose if you trace it back to the root, that might be so…」

Hearing Yue's objection, Hajime had a difficult time thinking of what to say. Seeing through Hajime, Yue asked with a quiet tone without intonation.

「… You've eaten that woman's dishes?」「Well, it ended up being that way.」

「… Was it delicious?」

「I don't really remember the taste much, but… well, it probably was. She was known for being good at cooking.」

「… I see.」

Jii, Jiiiii~~ Yue stared at him. She leaned forward, little by little, her

gaze fixed.「Yue?」

「She knows a Hajime I don't. She's fed Hajime her homemade

dishes. Unexpectedly, she remains in your memories… I'm jealous.」

「H, how straight. Rather, hold it. Why are you getting so close!」 Hajime called to Yue and held her shoulders to stop her from

approaching, as she was nearly falling on him. But before that, Yue said,

「… Mm. I will fill Hajime with me.」

「No, no, it was just by chance with Shirasaki, it wasn't particularly…」

「… Don't worry. It won't hurt. We're just going to rest for a little bit.」

「I've said it plenty of times already! Those are words for a man, not a woman! And not of a good man, either! Respect yourself a little more, you erotic Blood Sucking Princess!」

Mm~ Yue pointed her lips, urging him for a kiss, 「Don't think you can drain me like this all the time! This is a *NO*! I'm a Japanese man,」 Hajime muttered incomprehensibly. He still had some pride as a man. With that said, even if he had no fangs, he still seemed rebellious. Perhaps there was a stoic man somewhere who could easily shake off this woman's temptation, but at the very least, they were not here, and the person in question could not admit to being one of them.

In the first place, he had already accepted her, so any resistance was clearly empty.

Hajime had continued this empty fight since Yue attacked him in the bathroom 1 month prior, but he had yet to surpass her offensive.

For example, when she helped him train “Presence Interception” and “Physical Perception.”

Unable to find Hajime who was hiding seriously, given that she had endured the darkness of the Abyss alone for so long, Yue’s emotions burst out, and she began whimpering, 「Hajime～ Where are you～」like an infant, rubbing her wet eyes. Seeing this, Hajime immediately stopped hiding and appeared.

In a sense, this could not be considered a defeat, but his true loss occurred afterward.

After training, Yue went on the offensive, becoming extremely spoiled for many days afterward. As a result, she had fed on Hajime numerous times, making him go, 「Ahh～～～!!」

In addition, while Hajime was working hard transmuting bullets and developing new weapons, Yue decided to have a makeover — in short, she took up tailoring — The clothes available in Oscar’s hideout were lacking, so she used some of the demon skins lying around to make her own and Hajime’s clothes; Yue was confirming

Hajime's tastes one by one.

As such, she ended up with a Hajime-limited fashion show where she dressed him up completely… Yue's sewing skills also improved quickly, but she still fought desperately to make complicated clothing; eventually, with the repeated attempts, she was able to make adult clothes for the night battles.

Though she made them for herself, wearing them was still embarrassing. Even so, she held her own fashion show, which led to Hajime losing his reasoning. Needless to say, despite his reasoning taking a dive, Hajime still screamed 「Ahhhh～～～!!」

When they went fishing, seeing Yue wearing her bathing suit, the results obviously ended up with him screaming 「Ah～～～!!」 again.

Since the first night they bathed together, going in together was an unspoken assumption, and every time, he lost to Yue pleading to wash his back. But she did not stop with just his back. After all, in the end, Hajime screaming 「Ahh～～～!!」 became a custom.

Yue also sucked his blood regularly, always releasing an enchanting atmosphere. Hajime screaming 「Ahh～～～!!」 was already an everyday experience.

Hajime continued fighting with each event for the time being, but…

Recently, for reasons he himself did not understand, he was defeated without showing resistance more and more.

This time, the army that was Hajime's reasoning, his pride as a man, was overturned by the tsunami that was the infinite zeal and love overflowing from Yue.

Her final words were like a shot from the Holy Sword which subjugated the Devil. She heaved a burning hot sigh.

「… A kiss, I want one. Please.」

「!」

She looked at him with moist eyes; seeing his lover plead with him straight on, he lost all strength in his body and could not breathe. Unable to reject this Yue who had bug-level love stats, she did not miss her chance…

「Sh, shi—」

「Thanks for the meal.」

It goes without saying, the sounds of an empty man screaming 「Ahh～～～!」 were heard throughout the retreat.

The monster born in despair in the Abyss, against this childish-looking girl, had 0% chance of victory.

After suffering a defeat, Hajime rested in a soft couch while looking at the ceiling of the area where artificial moonlight shined in. In his arms was the Blood Sucking Princess who had a satisfied

expression.

Yue, who had entrusted herself to Hajime's chest, moved a little and looked at his face. Hajime had his eyes closed, but was not asleep; rather, he was simply relaxing.

Yue felt warm in her chest as she stared at Hajime's face. Though the heat was enough to burn her at any moment, rather than pain, she felt at ease, causing Yue to sigh heatedly.

For Yue, Hajime was a miracle.

That day, the vivid crimson light burned itself into her mind, Yue would never forget it for all her life. She tasted despair being imprisoned for 300 years, but she felt it was all to meet Hajime. Thinking of the warmth she had finally reached, she felt a bottomless happiness for the future, separating these emotions from her bitter past.

From a bystander's point of view, one may call this dependence, or perhaps the Suspension Bridge Effect, but their meeting was dramatic, so it was a natural thought.

But even if others might say this, Yue did not care. Their words, their intent, nothing. At that time, in the middle of their desperate fight with the scorpion demon, he did not desert her, fighting with her through life and death; Yue's very soul seemed to cry.

— I will dedicate myself to this person.

Hajime was obviously walking a difficult path unique to him. Even so, something deep within Yue said 「This is the person.」 Simply befriending this person did not even occur to her for a moment.

Putting it into words, perhaps it would sound cliché, and Yue would never say it herself… still, if she dared to do so, theirs would be “Fate.” For Yue, it was surely fate.

That was why Yue would not stop.

She would express her love with all her might. She would convey her goodwill with her entire body. She would not hesitate to dedicate all of herself. She had this determination for the boy she met after 300 years.

Even if Hajime had someone else in his heart, even if Hajime antagonized the world, even if Hajime grew annoyed with Yue, it did not matter.

「… Fu fu, you can’t run from the Blood Sucking Princess.」 In other words, it was like that.

「Hm? What did you say?」

Hearing Yue mutter to herself, Hajime opened his eyes a little. Yue looked up at him from his chest, and he brushed a few hairs hanging by her mouth.

「It’s nothing,」 she answered as she ducked her head ticklishly when Hajime brushed his fingers against her cheek.

Perhaps finding Yue's reaction interesting, Hajime continued running his fingers down her chin and scratched at the scruff of her neck.

「Mm,」「Afuu,」her voice gradually grew sweet; though Hajime began pulling his hand back, Yue's eyes appealed to him, 「I want you to continue.」

Hajime gazed about, but he gave up quickly. Against this far- too cute and beautiful girl who sidled up to him like a cat, he felt the silky, velvety skin of her fingers run along his hand. This, too, was a small defeat.

Surely, from now on, no matter how strong he got, no matter how monstrous he became from falling into the Abyss, he would never win against this bewitching Blood Sucking Princess.

If one were to say "Falling in love is a defeat," against this Blood Sucking Princess, he would be a loser throughout life.

He was both a loser as well as a winner.

Such is the relationship between the monster of the Abyss and the Blood Sucking Princess.